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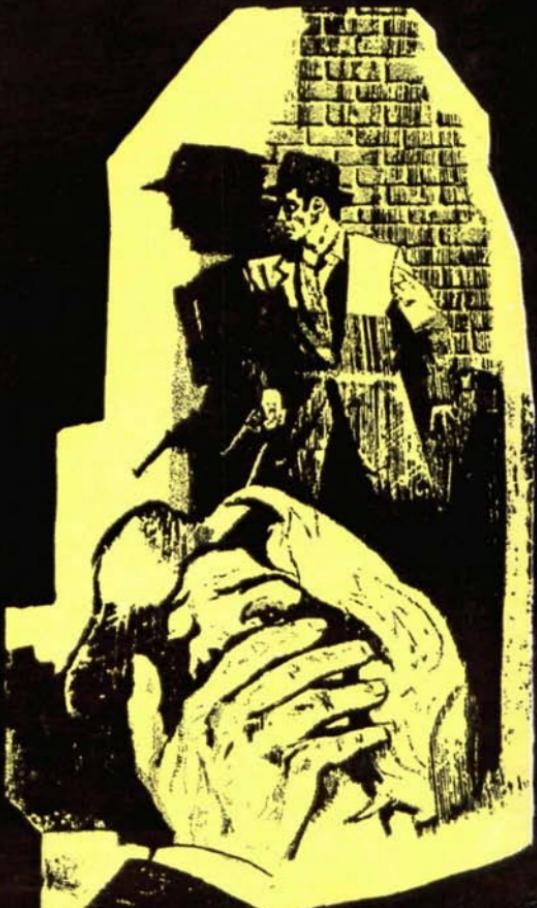
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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE FAT MAN

by BRETT HALLIDAY

He'd played hard and fast with death many times. But this time it was different, Mike Shayne knew. This time it was coming swift and sure. The man said, "It's one barrel for your belly, Shayne, the other for the little broad. You want it first—or maybe you'd rather watch..."

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THE FAT MAN

Death was very close. The man with the shotgun said, "It is one barrel for your belly, Mike Shayne, the other for the lady. Or maybe she gets it first so you can watch. How's that?"

by BRETT HALLIDAY



IT WASN'T the best bar in Miami—or the second best or the third. Not even the owner could have claimed it rated anywhere in the first couple of thousand.

It was a hole in the wall with plaster fallen off the ceiling and paint-peeling walls and a dirty floor. It stank of stale beer and unwashed patrons and the all pervasive stink of one of the filthiest washrooms south of

Washington, D.C. The few patrons were as gloom ridden as their surroundings.

Even the big man in the dark suit who occupied the booth nearest the front entrance seemed far from his usual contained self.

His head ached and his throat had the sore rasp of the regular South Florida winter flu bug. He had aches in his bones and a queasy stomach which he

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THE
NEW
MIKE
SHAYNE
SHORT
NOVEL



was trying to quiet with a double shot of strong, dark Jamaican rum. He would have preferred brandy, but this bar stocked only the bare essentials.

The big man's name was Michael Shayne. He was a private detective, and he was working on a case.

The frowzy blond in the next booth kept shooting speculative glances at the big fellow. She had been beautiful once and her blonde hair was still natural but at the moment she was hung over, broke, over made up and overage for maximum success at the world's oldest profession.

Hope springs eternal though. She nursed the dregs of a mug of beer and watched Mike Shayne. He tried hard not to notice.

Outside it was almost dusk. There was standing water in the street, where the hard showers heralding a new cold spell had dumped it earlier that day. The wind was out of the north and it blew hard. Shayne shivered and cursed the bug that was making him miserable. This was a part of The Magic City that the northern tourists never saw.

The young fellow came down the street and into the bar at a pace so fast it was almost a run. He was thin in the legs and hips but his shoulders were broad and his arms bulged

with the exaggerated muscles of a dedicated weight lifter. He wore double knit flare slacks and a broad belt with a big silver buckle and over that a mod leather shirt with imitation buckskin fringe. The shoes on his feet were square toed and bright orange.

The face that peered out from a tangle of long hair, mustache and sideburns was young-old, feral and cruel like the face of a rabid fox. His name was Armando Nold, and he was the man Mike Shayne had been waiting for.

In his own unpleasant way Armando had recently begun to assume a role of some importance in certain Miami circles.

He bellied up to the bar, where the barmaid was already drawing a dirty glass mug of cold beer. He had his back to the booths, but the mirror behind the bar showed him the whole of the room.

"I want to talk to you, Army," Mike Shayne said from the booth.

Armando wasted no time on small talk. He came round on his heel and threw the heavy mug full of beer at the big detective's head. Then he was following it across the narrow floor of the bar with a wicked, five inch switch blade stiletto suddenly in his fist.

Shayne dodged the beer mug

by instinct though some of the sour brew splashed his chin and jacket. He slid out of the booth, still in a crouch, his big arms spread wide and the strong hands ready. Mike Shayne was a fighter born and honed to perfection by many years of practice.

Armando feinted with the knife. At least that's what he thought he was doing.

Mike Shayne riposted with the deadly speed of a striking snake. He got one big hand on the wrist of Armando's knife hand and clamped down like a vise. Wrist bones grated and the fingers spread wide. The knife dropped and imbedded its point in the dirty flooring so that it stood, quivering between the men.

Armando yelled in anger and fright combined. His yell was answered from in front of the building. The four friends he'd left out in the street were fighting each other to get through the front door. Mike Shayne could see the shine of knives and at least one gun in their hands.

The afternoon was suddenly getting hairy, indeed.

The big private eye clamped his other hand over the elaborate silver buckle on his opponent's belt. With a co-ordinated heave of arms and shoulders he plucked the man

clean off his feet, hoisted him shoulder high and heaved Nold into the faces of the first two hoods to get through the door.

The three went down in a tangle of arms and legs, effectively blocking the door to the two others behind them.

Mike Shayne set his shoulders and waited. He was beginning to wonder if he'd have to use the big Colt's forty-five he wore in a belt holster under his jacket and back of the right hip.

The woman who had been watching him from the booth said behind him: "This way, Mr. Shayne. There's a way out the back."

Mike Shayne whirled and followed her to the rear of the bar. There was a door there leading out into a dirty and cluttered alley. As he went out Shayne took the key from the inside of the door and locked it from the alley side. Of course that wouldn't hold up five young hoods for long, but it might be the margin of time he would need.

His guide said: "Right across the alley, the second door to your left. My room is up the stairs. You can wait there till it's clear for a getaway."

Shayne followed her without protest. They were barely under cover in a dark hallway when he heard crashing sounds where

the bar door was being broken down.

"Thanks," he said to the woman.

"I think I'm crazy," she said. "Army Nold will likely kill me for this."

II

MIKE SHAYNE looked at the woman curiously. "Do I know you?" he asked.

She shrugged and gave him a half-coquettish look over her shoulder. "No. But I know who you are, Mike Shayne. I've heard of you plenty like anybody in Miami has. They say you're on the square with your friends and you're a decent guy."

"I hope so."

"That's what they say. I know Army Nold too, and all the things you are is what he ain't. Maybe I even know what you want with him. At least I know enough to make it worth your while to buy from me. Are you interested?"

"When I know what you've got to sell, I can tell you better about that," Shayne said cautiously.

"I got plenty," she said. "Just let's get out of this hall before somebody comes by and spots us. That wouldn't be healthy for me. Come on up to my room. You can wait there

till them bums stop looking for you."

"Okay."

They went on up two flights of stairs to the dilapidated efficiency apartment that the woman called home. Inside, Shayne sat on the couch, where he could watch the street below out the window without being seen himself.

The woman sat opposite him with a can of beer she'd taken from the small refrigerator.

"My name's Claire," she told him. "Claire Allen. I get around. I hang around. I hear a lot of things one way and another."

She drank some of the beer and Shayne waited for her. Out in the alley he saw two of Nold's boys come back and go in the rear door of the bar.

"If you're after Army Nold it ain't to tap him for the Iron Arrow, that well known honor society at the University of Miami. No sir, it's gotta be because of what he does. An' what Army Nold does the most of and does the best besides beating up women and welching on his debts is to steal cars. That's so, ain't it?"

"That's right," Shayne said. "What do you know about him stealing cars?"

"I know plenty," she said. "I know who works with him and how many he steals and how he

does the jobs. That oughta be worth some money?"

"I already know all those things, Claire," Mike Shayne said soberly. "How come you think I was looking for Army Nold this afternoon? What I need to know is who his bosses are. The people I work for want to know where the money goes and how the cars are sold?"

She drank some beer. "I ain't a bigshot, Shayne. Since I got old I don't have parties with bigshots any more. What you want is real hot news, man. Hot enough to burn a girl like me. That is if I knew it and if anybody thought you got it from me."

"Do you know it? Any of it?"

"I know some of what you want," she said. "Not all of it but maybe some. It's hot, though like I said. The question is what would it be worth to you?"

Shayne took a thick pigskin wallet out of his back pocket and extracted a sheaf of bills.

"The people I work for got money, Claire," he said. "I got a good expense account."

He very carefully counted out five one hundred dollar bills onto the worn slip cover of the couch where he sat. When she widened her eyes and reached out, he kept one heavy hand over the bills.



"Before you pick this up you tell me what it is that you've got."

"If I was you," she said with her eyes watching the money greedily, "I'd go talk to Fat Sam. Army Nold, he sees a lot of the Fat Man these days, and you know they ain't in the same league at all. He goes to see the Fat Man and when he comes back he's got money. Money in his hand."

Shayne took his hand off the five hundred dollar bills, and she had them so fast it was almost as if they just melted into thin air.

The big detective was still watching the alley below. Two men came out of the back door of the bar where the fight had taken place.

One of them was Armando

Nold. The other was a little splinter of a man about the size of a jockey. He wore pointed shoes and a very expensive Italian silk one-button jacket suit with wide lapels and a hand woven white Panama hat in the two hundred dollar price range. The face under the hat brim was no bigger than a child's but it was as intent and as cruel as a ferret. They started up the alley towards the back door to the building where Claire lived.

III

"LET'S GO, Claire," Mike Shayne said and got to his feet.

"Whattaya mean let's go?"

"Just go," Shayne said. "Go fast. Don't pack. Somehow Army Nold has remembered you were in that bar when he came in. He's on his way up here right now."

She was a little drunk. "You can take Army Nold, big man. You want to talk to him, don't you?"

"He's got Killi-killy with him," Shayne said.

She said: "Oh my God." Her face was white as a sheet and there was no more bravado in her at all.

The two of them went down the front stairs of the building while Nold and the dapper little contract killer were climbing the back.

Out on the street Shayne kept them close to the building fronts until they'd rounded a couple of corners and found his car, where he'd left it parked out of sight of the bar.

He put her in the front seat beside him and started the engine, heading East towards Biscayne Boulevard in the rain.

"Shayne," she said, "I want out of this. If he's got Killi-killy Morton in this thing, it means they want you dead. Me too, if they think I'm in with you. I'm no gun fighter, Mr. Shayne. I'm scared."

"I don't blame you," the big private eye said. "That little gunsel likes to kill people. But you don't have to worry. I gave you five C-notes. That ought to be enough to hide out with for a while. You lay low."

"The five centuries won't last forever."

"See what else you can find out for me," he said, "and there can be more. The Fat Man is a lead but he's a front man. I need to know who he's fronting for this time. You find that out and I'll be handing you thousands instead of hundreds. You got friends. My phone is in the book. Anything you come up with, give me a call. If I'm out my secretary, Lucy Hamilton, will talk to you. You can trust her. Okay?"

He could feel her shiver on

the seat beside him. "Okay—I guess. Maybe I just ought to blow town. That little creep scares me. Mr. Shayne."

"Suit yourself," Shayne said. "Remember, my clients will pay well for information. Now where do you want me to drop you off?"

Twenty minutes later Mike Shayne was back in his second floor office on Flagler Street in Miami. Rain, driven by a brisk wind off Biscayne Bay, streaked the window panes and lashed at the crowds on the sidewalk below. The big man was pouring himself a stiff jolt of brandy from a bottle of his favorite brand.

"By the looks of you, you could use hot coffee and aspirin and some bed rest instead of that brandy," Lucy Hamilton said from her desk across the office.

"No time for that now," Shayne said. "Anybody who goes in for bed rest and aspirin when Morton is after them is liable to never get out of the bed again. No, I've got plenty to do before the bed rest routine starts."

He definitely had a sore throat and a headache by now. His sinuses felt impacted to a point where there was pressure all behind his brows. The muscles of his arms and legs had a dull ache. He knew Lucy was

right, and grumbled at the tourist-born bug that was making its annual winter shambles of the South Florida Sun Coast.

"Who is this Morton anyway?" Lucy Hamilton asked. "Somebody I should know?"

"Somebody I hope you never meet, Angel," Shayne said. "He's an ex-jockey turned killer after he was barred from the track for brutality to his mounts. He's one of the rare kind that kills because he enjoys it. Absolutely ruthless. Mean as a snake in high grass. If he's mixed up in this it means whoever hired him wants a killing. I mean not only that they're willing to kill, but they'd rather do it the hard way than not."

"I don't like it, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said with real concern. "When you took this job I thought you'd be up against car thieves and small timers like Armando Nold. I didn't know killers were involved like this Morton person. Why is he anyway?"

"Why is his kind ever involved?" Shayne said and poured more brandy into his glass. "Money. Real big money. I should have guessed. Intercontinent Insurance told me the car ring they're after could be doing a business running to millions of dollars in a year."

They had information to that effect. Whoever's getting that sort of dough can afford a Morton to protect it."

"If the company knows all that, why not just call the police? Why involve you, Michael?"

"Because they don't know enough," Shayne said. "They know the cars are stolen and who does the actual heisting. That's Army Nold and his punks of course. Then the cars vanish. They don't show up in any of the usual markets in the north or west. They just vanish. That's what I'm supposed to find out about instead of sitting around here on my tail taking it easy. It's going to be a long night, Angel. You go on home and get some rest."

"You aren't well, Michael. Can't this wait?"

"Not with Morton on the grounds it can't."

"At least promise to stop by my place later, Michael. I've some antibiotic pills left over from the time I had the bug. Let me give you those and some hot food and see how you are."

"Okay, Angel," the big man said. "I'll check in later on. First I've got work to do, though."

"I guess that'll have to do then," she said. "Where are you going now?"

"First of all," he said, "I

think I better have a chat with the Fat Man."

IV

FAT SAM VAMUELS liked money better than anything else in the world. There was no close runner up for tops on his priority list. It was money all the way and by six lengths in the stretch with no challenger at all.

Next to money he liked food, expensive clothes and cheap women and watching other people gamble. Fat Sam never gambled himself of course, and the people he liked to watch weren't really gambling either, that is if gambling includes a chance to win. Neither was anyone else who staked their cash in one of Fat Sam's games.

He owned a string of clubs and gaming rooms around south Florida and had his office in one of them, a big old stucco palace way up Highway U.S.1 towards the Broward County line.

As a matter of camouflage or protective coloration the modest sign on Fat Sam's door just said BOOKKEEPER in small letters. It didn't really fool anybody.

When Mike Shayne got to the club it was still early in the evening. He parked across the

Boulevard in front of a real estate office and circled down the block on foot so as to come into the club by the back door. The front would be guarded, he knew, and one or more of the guards might know the big detective by sight.

He preferred to arrive unannounced.

The kitchen door was open to let out the heat and odors from the big ovens. At this time the restaurant adjoining the gambling rooms would be doing a good business, although its biggest rush would wait for the late night supper crowd.

Chefs, assistant cooks, bus boys and waiters were milling about the crowded kitchens. Nobody paid any attention to Shayne. They were all busy with their own work and had no time or interest to spare for a casual stranger.

Shayne moved fast for all of that. No telling when someone who knew him would happen along. He got into the back hall from which the offices opened, and found the door he was looking for with no trouble.

A waiter was just coming out after delivering Fat Sam's more than ample dinner on a serving cart. Shayne pushed past the man into the room.

Fat Sam was alone, seated back of a big mahogany desk the top of which was covered



with dishes and platters of food. At first he didn't notice that anyone had come in past the waiter. When he did his eyes widened with surprise but then hooded down to slits when he recognized the private detective.

"What the hell are you doing here, Shayne?" he said then.

"Just a social call, Sam," Shayne said. "Go on with your regular feeding. Only don't push any buzzers or step on an alarm button. If any of your hoods should show up while I'm here I'd likely get just a mite annoyed with you."

"So what?" Vamuels said blandly.

"So then I might kick your

head off and stuff it in the wastebasket, which would be real bad, because all I really want out of you is some information."

Fat Sam uncovered a plate of rich soup, sniffed the fragrant steam and took a large spoonful. He smacked his thick lips.

"Lots of people ask me questions, Shayne. Of course I don't always answer them. What would yours be about? I can't recollect any way I've crossed you lately."

"You haven't," the big man assured him. "I told you this isn't personal unless you get tough and make it that way. All I want is some information, like I said. Nobody even has to know it comes from you."

The Fat Man went on eating soup. He wasn't going to be helpful. Shayne waited a moment.

"Sam," he said then, "you've been payoff man to Army Nold."

"I wouldn't wipe my foot with Armando Nold," Fat Sam said. He said it with great emphasis and pushed the soup aside to uncover a fine roast of Beef Wellington.

"I know you wouldn't," Shayne said. "Army is a punk who heists cars you don't steal that way and you don't steal that small. Nevertheless you've

been paying Army Nold. So you're paying him off for someone else. I'm curious. I want to know who you're paying him for. That's all."

"You want I should tell you where you can stuff that curiosity of yours," Fat Sam said, preparing to carve the roast.

Mike Shayne reached out one long arm and picked the roast off the platter in one big-knuckled hand. It was hot from the oven and he juggled it for a moment.

Then he threw it as hard as he could at a life size portrait of a neon nude painted on velvet and hung on the opposite wall. The roast and its attendant sauces and juices hit with a good solid splat just about midway between the nude's collarbones and knees. It made a royal—and permanent—wreck of the painting.

Fat Sam sat frozen in his desk chair with his mouth hanging open and the carving knife and fork still gripped in his two hands.

"You shouldn't of done that, Mike," he said finally. "I paid a thousand dollars for that painting."

"You were robbed," Shayne said. "It's a lousy daub a five-year-old could have done with his fingers. You could get the model for half a G."

"You trying to commit suicide or what?"

"I'm just trying to convince you I mean what I say. I want you to talk," Shayne said. "Next time it could be your head I throw at that picture."

"I'm gonna do you a favor," Fat Sam said then. "Mind you, I ain't admitting I even know what you're talking about and I want you to pay for that picture. Still I'm doing you a favor. I'm telling you to get out of town, Mike. It could be there's a contract on you. Mind, I only say there could be."

"I know all about that," Mike Shayne said. "You pass the word to Killi-Killy Morton I'll kill him on sight." He could see the Fat Man's eyes widen in surprise. "First, though, you tell me who the boss man in this caper is. You tell me that."

Shayne never would know if it was an accident or if the Fat Man had managed to get his foot on an alarm button under the rug, but at that moment he heard the lock click as the office door behind him swung open.

He swung round on his heel.

Two of the plug-uglies Fat Sam employed as house men in the gambling joint were coming through the door. They were both big and tough, with muscles that bulged out of the white dinner jackets they wore.

On top of that they were experienced rough and tumble, no holds barred type fighters.

The one in the lead was really big, a good two inches taller than Shayne himself.

The second man had Claire Allen by the elbow and was half-pulling, half pushing her into the room.

"Boss," the second man started, "this broad says—"

Then they all saw Mike Shayne. They stopped, jammed together and blocking the doorway; unsure of what they were expected to do next.

Fat Sam settled that little detail for them.

"Take the bum!" he yelled, jerking his thumb at Mike Shayne.

Shayne didn't wait to be taken. He came out of the chair in which he'd been sitting in front of the desk with one fluid movement of controlled power and violence.

As he rose one big arm swept back to tumble a half dozen dishes of food in the gambling boss's lap as it swept across the desk top. The fat man yelled as the hot gravies soaked through to the skin and grease and sauces ruined his suit.

The big hood came at Mike Shayne in a savage rush.

Shayne braced against the desk, swung his right leg and launched a vicious kick at the

charging hoodlum's solar plexus. If it had landed properly, the kick would have put the fellow out for the count. It didn't.

The hood was fast and a gutter fighter whom nothing surprised. He rolled away fast and took the kick on the left side of the rib cage. Even at that it knocked him away from the desk so that he fell over a chair and went down on the thick-piled carpet.

His pal by the doorway wasted no time on heroics. He clawed for the gun he wore in a belt holster.

To do that he had to let go of Claire Allen's arms. She grabbed at him, caught his right arm even as it stretched for the gun, and sank her teeth in his biceps. The bite didn't penetrate the cloth of his jacket sleeve of course, but it hurt and distracted him. He lost precious seconds.

Mike Shayne took full advantage of them.

He came the few steps across the office and swung a hard right hand punch. The hood blocked with his left arm, but the blow was still hard enough to stagger him. He tried to set his feet for balance, and Claire stamped the spike heel of her shoe onto the instep of his right foot. That hurt.

Before the man could

recover, Shayne hit him again with a hard left and right. The hood fell away from the doorway.

The door was still open and a waiter with a tray of more food for Fat Sam suddenly appeared there.

The waiter was an elderly man with sore feet and decidedly no hero. He took one look at what was going on in the office and bolted back down the corridor, still carrying his tray.

Shayne knew he'd spread the alarm as soon as he recovered his cool and reinforcements for Sam's hoods would appear in overwhelming force.

By now the two hoods in the office were back on their feet and closing in again.

Mike Shayne hit the nearest a full armed right handed swing that almost broke the man's neck. That took him permanently out of this particular ruckus.

Fat Sam was digging into the top drawer of his desk with both hands. Shayne knew what that meant. He was across the room in two long strides and slapped the fat man back. His swivel chair fell over and Fat Sam hit his head on the floor as he fell. He lay there, half dazed and bellowing like a wounded hippo.

Shayne used one big hand to

scoop the pistol Fat Sam had been groping for out of the desk drawer. It was gummed with food sauce that had run off the desk top into the drawer. There were papers stuck to the gun. Shayne shoved the whole mess into the side pocket of his jacket.

The biggest hood, the one Shayne had kicked, was back on his feet, but he seemed to be still partly stunned. He stood there wavering on spread legs without even reaching for the gun Shayne knew he had under his jacket.

The red-headed detective didn't wait for the man to recover but pushed Claire ahead of him through the door.

"Along the hallway to your left," he told her. "We're going out the back way."

They had almost made it to the door into the big kitchens by the time the hood came bursting into the hall from Fat Sam's office.

He'd recovered enough to have his gun in his hand and snapped off a shot at them, but he was still groggy enough so the shot went high into the ceiling over the door.

Shayne got Claire into the kitchens.

"Out the back door and wait for me," he snapped at her. "I'll be along in a minute."

She ran through the hurrying



TIM ROURKE

cooks, busboys and waiters without questioning him.

Mike Shayne shifted to the side of the swinging doors from the hall and crouched down till he was almost kneeling on the floor.

As he'd expected, the pursuing hoodlum came through the swinging doors fast, gun in hand, his eyes raking the big room for the fugitives.

Shayne didn't give him time to realize what was up. He came forward, still in the crouch, and got the man around the knees in a regular bear hug. When he stood up the hood fell forward over his shoulder, so he was carried like a sack of flour. He was far too startled to use his gun.

Directly across the big room four cooks were broiling and frying steaks and chops on the

sizzling hot iron top of a ten foot long range. The meat popped in hot fat as it grilled.

Shayne ran the intervening distance and, with a mighty heave, threw the big hood onto the hot iron grille with the smoking meat. He lit on his back, slid the length of the grille as the smoking fat soaked his clothes, and fell off on the floor at the other end.

He wasn't seriously hurt but he was screaming in pain and fear.

The kitchen help gave Shayne a clear path to the door.

V

IN THE alley back of the gambling house Mike Shayne found Claire Allen waiting as he'd told her to do.

"Let's go," he said. "My car's not far from here."

She fell in at his side, though it took her two or three steps to match each one of his long strides. "Shouldn't we run?"

They came out of the service alley then and the big man slowed his pace.

"No need for that. It's early and there's traffic and people around. They won't try to kill us on the streets with witnesses. Will Gentry runs too tight a town for them to think they could get away with that."

"Oh."

"Yes," he went on. "Fat Sam wants me killed by now, but he won't want it done so it can be pinned on him. They'll wait till Killi-Killy or somebody can catch me in a lonely spot with my back wide open."

They walked on down the block.

"Old Sam lost his head in there. If his boys had managed to kill us, he'd have been in a real spot and he wouldn't have liked it. Here's my car."

When they were driving again in heavy evening traffic, Shayne spoke to the woman again.

"What were you doing in Fat Sam's I thought I told you to hide out."

"I know you did," she said, "and that's what I started out to do. I went to a girl friend's apartment. We've know each other a long time, and I thought I'd be safe there. She had to go out to the dance hall where she works, the *Green Pigeon*."

Shayne knew the place. It was a disreputable dime-a-dance clip joint over the county line in Dania.

"I guess somebody got to her there," Claire continued. "They must have put out the word I was wanted right after Army found I'd helped you. So somebody put pressure on my friend. I guess that must have been it. Anyway the first thing

I knew them two bums showed up at my girl friend's. She must have given them a key, because I was asleep and then there they were right by the bed. They let me get dressed and then took me down to the Fat Man's. You know the rest."

"Yeah," the big man said, "you all got there in time to keep me from getting any real information out of the Fat Man. Another ten minutes alone with him and I'd have had him singing like a canary."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. It wasn't a picnic for me either. I didn't know what Fatso was going to have them do to me."

"I know that," Shayne said. "The question is, what do I do with you now?"

"You could let me off anywhere. I've still got the five C notes you gave me. Them hoods didn't know I had that so they didn't think I was worth robbing. I can find a place."

Mike Shayne thought that over for a couple of blocks as they drove on south on Highway U.S. 1.

"I don't think so," he told her finally. "That didn't work out too well the first time. Anyplace you could go by yourself, they'd likely enough get a line on you."

"I'd be okay," she protested. "Besides I don't really know anything about you to give

away that they don't already have."

"It's not that," Shayne said. "They probably wouldn't believe you anyway. Then you could get hurt. Everybody in this caper seems to want to play rough. No, I'm going to take you someplace where I know you'll be safe. There's a friend of mine lives only a mile or so from here who can look after you for tonight anyway."

Mike Shayne's friend was named Tim Rourke and he was an ace feature writer for the *Miami News*. He and the big detective had been close friends for years.

The years had been good to Rourke. He had a luxury apartment in one of the high-rise co-op buildings that had been sprouting like steel, chrome and glass towers between Biscayne Boulevard and the shimmering tropical waters of the Bay.

Claire Allen's eyes widened when they drove up to the entrance and she saw the doorman and the luxuriously furnished lower lobby of the building.

The doorman's eyes widened equally when Mike Shayne took the woman past him into the lobby. She wasn't exactly the sort of visitor he usually ushered in.

He recognized Shayne

though and knew better than to make any comment.

Fortunately for Shayne his friend Rourke hadn't gone out for the evening yet. The newspaperman opened the apartment door for them himself, took in the evidence of the fight in the gambling house with a keenly observant eye and stood back to let them in.

Only when they were all in the big living room looking out across the bay did he say anything at all.

"You look like you fell off the thirteenth floor of a fourteen floor building," he said to Shayne. "Want to tell me what it's all about?"

"No," Shayne said, "I don't. At least not till you remember your manners and fix us both a couple of good stiff drinks I don't."

Rourke put his portable bar to good use, fixing tall rum drinks for himself and Claire and a double shot of vintage French brandy for his big friend.

Mike Shayne told him a little of the fight in the gambling house then.

"What does the other guy look like?" Rourke asked them.

"He's suffering from heat prostration," Shayne said dryly. "I put him on the griddle with the steaks."

Tim Rourke choked on his

drink. "My god! I really think you mean what you said."

"I do," Shayne told him. "Just what I said. Anyhow you can see why Claire here can't be out in the open tonight. I thought maybe you could let her stay here till morning anyway."

"For an old friend, sure," Rourke said. "I better lend you a jacket too, Mike. You seem to have ruined that one."

He was looking at the right hand pocket of Shayne's jacket. It was the one into which he'd stuffed the gun from Fat Sam's desk drawer.

When Shayne looked down he realized that the pocket was ripped and stained with grease and sauces. He pulled out the gun and the sheaf of gravy stained papers that came with it.

He looked at the papers again and gave a low whistle.

"What have you got?" Rourke asked.

A wide grin spread across the big man's face.

"I think maybe this is what I went to Fat Sam's place to find," he said.

VI

"WHAT DO you mean by that?" Claire Allen asked. She moved over to look at the papers, but Mike Shayne picked

them up before she could see them.

"That's right," Tim Rourke said. "What have you got there, Maestro?"

"I'm not sure yet, but I think it's important," Shayne said.

He moved over to the couch where he could spread out the papers on the coffee table under a light. With his big linen handkerchief he started to wipe off what he could of the grease and gravy stains.

The papers were invoices and bills of lading for large amounts of expensive but otherwise unidentified "merchandise" and "agricultural machinery". Some were receipts. All were marked "paid in cash".

Every one of the papers was written and indorsed in Spanish instead of in English. They were dated at at least three major Latin American ports.

Like most people who have done business in the south Florida Gold Coast area since the big post-Castro Cuban refugee influx, Mike Shayne had acquired a good working familiarity with the language in both its written and spoken forms.

"I think I've got something important here," he said finally, looking up from the papers. "Old buddy Fat Sam's been

doing a lot of business that can't be connected up with gambling or loan sharking. Of course his name isn't on any of these"—he indicated the grease-stained papers with a casual wave of one big hand—"but I don't suppose even he knows all the aliases he operates under. These came out of his desk, so he has to be involved right up to the neck."

"Suppose you tell me what they're about," Rourke said. "I work for the *News*, remember? It's a paper and it likes its men to bring in complete stories. A quaint custom, but I have to abide by it."

"Later," Shayne said to his friend. "I've only got part of the story here. When I get the rest of it, you'll have an exclusive and I promise you that."

"Well, tell me what you can anyway," Rourke urged him.

"Keep your shirt on. These papers show somebody's been exporting a lot of heavy goods to South America. It's been going out of the Port of Miami and Port Everglades. It goes C.O.D. and payment is always receipted for in cash."

"It could be hot cars. The only trouble is the Port records don't show any unusual shipments originating in this area. That's all been checked out by the insurance company that

hires me. That's the big problem I'm hired for. Where do the stolen cars go and how do they get there? They don't show up as an increase in stolen cars on any of the American markets."

"Well, doesn't this stuff you've got show they're going to South America?" Rourke asked. "American cars sell at a real premium down there, even old heaps."

"These aren't old heaps," Shayne said. "This gang steals premium stuff. The question is, how do they get it there? The shipments out of this port are watched. You can't hide a hundred Cadillacs and Buicks in the false bottom of a suitcase and smuggle them out."

"Well, they're doing it some way," Rourke said.

"Apparently they are. I've got to find out how."

"You'd better get some sleep first, and some clean clothes."

"You're right," the big man said. "I think I'll go by Lucy's place too. I've got spare jacket and slacks there. Besides, I promised I'd check in with her."

Weariness was reinforcing the flu bug that had attacked the big detective earlier in the day. He was feverish and his head and the muscles of his arms and legs ached. The antibiotics Lucy Hamilton had

promised might give him some relief. Besides she'd fix him something to eat, and the way he felt that would be a lot better than a restaurant meal.

"I'll go by Lucy's," he told them, "and get on this again in the morning. At least I know what I'm up to now. I know more or less what I'm looking for."

Lucy Hamilton's apartment was on the same side of town as Tim Rourke's although in a much older, four-story building that had long outlived its days as a top rental accommodation. However, the apartments were big and comfortable and convenient to town.

As Shayne drove into the parking lot, he could see that there was a light burning in the living room of Lucy Hamilton's third floor apartment. She was probably reading or watching teevy while waiting for him to check in, as he'd promised her earlier in the day.

He parked in the lot behind the building and took the self-service elevator up to Lucy Hamilton's floor, after pushing the lobby buzzer in his usual code ring to tell her he was on his way up.

At the apartment door he knocked lightly and then stepped on in as the door was opened for him.

But it wasn't Lucy Hamilton

who had opened the door for him. Lucy was sitting, very straight and very white-faced, in a chair clear across the living room from the door.

The next thing Mike Shayne saw was a sawed-off double barrel shotgun out of grabbing range and leveled at his own stomach.

Armando Nold was holding the shotgun and he was holding it with a cool, professional steadiness. There was a broad grin on his face but the look in his eyes said all he wanted was an excuse to pull the triggers.

The redhead froze in his tracks.

Nold had two of his boys with him. One had opened the door to let the big detective in. The other was inside the bedroom door, where he could cover the whole living room and watch every move the others made.

Both of the hoods had snub-nosed, thirty-eight special caliber detective special type revolvers in their hands. Mike Shayne was completely outgunned and he knew it.

"I'm sorry, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said from the chair. She managed to keep her voice modulated and controlled.

"That's okay, Angel," Shayne said.

"I didn't open the door for them," Lucy said. "They were



waiting for me when I came home. They got me in the parking lot and made me bring them on up here."

"I said it was all right," Shayne told her. He was busy trying to find an opening for action, but the three hoods were spread out so he could only jump one at a time. That wouldn't help.

He took a couple of paces into the room and the man who had opened the door for him shut it firmly so that the spring lock clicked.

Then the man moved up behind the big redhead and took the forty-five caliber Colt's out of its belt holster. He stepped quickly away again.

Army Nold didn't relax at all. He kept the shotgun leveled as steady as a rock. At that range even bird shot would have cut Mike Shayne in half, and

the twin tubes were probably loaded with 00 Buckshot.

"What's all this about?" Shayne said, playing for time. "You know better than to horse me around like this, Army."

Nold laughed at that.

"Start something, hard man," he said. "Then it's one barrel for your belly and the other for the lady. Or maybe she gets it first so you can watch. How's that?"

"I said what's this about?" Shayne said. "First you pull a knife on me this afternoon and now this. All I want is to ask you some questions."

The young hood in the bedroom doorway sniggered. "A real comic," he said. "Blow his guts out, Army and let's get out of here. I'm going to need a fix soon."

"You shut up," Nold told his boy. "I'm getting a real load of jollies out of this. I'm going to take my time and watch this big fink squirm."

After a moment he said to Shayne: "Beg for your life, shamus. Beg real good."

Shayne looked back at him without a word.

"Beg, I said," Army Nold said and waggled the muzzle of his shotgun suggestively. "Maybe down on your knees for a starter. Or maybe I let your ever-loving broad have it first."

"They're going to kill us both anyway," Lucy Hamilton said. She managed to keep all emotion out of her voice.

"If that's so, I've got a right to know why," Mike Shayne said. "Any man has a right to know why he dies."

"I guess he does at that," said the man who had taken Shayne's gun. "A man's got that right. Go on and tell him, Army."

"Tell him nothing," the one in the bedroom door said. "this is a pig. Nothing but a pig. Shoot him in the gut so he lives long enough I can kick his brains out for him. That's what I want to do for all these damned pigs."

"The trouble is, Shayne," Army Nold said, "you got yourself mighty unpopular in the wrong places. Fat Sam, he's real mad at you, Shayne. He don't like the way you messed up his office for him. He says to go find you and rub you out, shamus. He says five grand for your head on a plate, shamus. That's Fat Sam. He don't forget and he don't forgive."

Shayne grinned at the deadly little hood.

"I thought it was something like that," he said. "All a big misunderstanding."

"You're crazy," Nold said flatly.

"We got our orders," one of

his friends said. "Find you and kill you."

"Hurry up," said the one in the bedroom. "I told you I'm gonna need a fix."

"You better talk to Fat Sam," Shayne said easily. "By now he's changed his mind. You kill me now, and Fat Sam will have a contract out on you as soon as he hears. I know what I'm talking about."

"I think you're nuts," Nold said.

Mike Shayne laughed in his face. "Nobody jokes with a load of double-oh Buckshot," he said. "Use the phone there on the table. Tell Fat Sam the papers I took out of his desk aren't here. You tell him they're where Will Gentry will have them if I get shot. Or don't show in twenty-four hours."

Armando Nold still hesitated.

"Go on," Shayne said. "Call your boss. He knows what I'm talking about, Army. Tell him what I said."

VII

ARMANDO NOLD thought it over for a moment and then moved over to the table where Lucy Hamilton's phone rested. He was careful to lay the shotgun across the table so that it continued to point directly at the big private eye, and his

hand was never far from the trigger as he dialed a local number.

When he had his connection he spoke at length, but in such a low tone that Mike Shayne could only make out a word here and there. If he was talking to Fat Sam, he seemed to be arguing with him, but in the end he gave in.

"Okay, boss. Okay," he said in a louder tone, and put the instrument back in its cradle.

Then he picked up the shotgun again and addressed Shayne directly.

"Your luck's in, shamus," he said to him. "At least for a while it is. The boss says take you along."

He looked over at Lucy Hamilton. "He didn't say nothing about your broad though."

"You hurt her," Shayne said quietly, "and you'll have to kill me right here, because I'll take you or die trying."

Army Nold laughed. "Soft on her, ain't you? Okay then, we'll take her along with us."

Instead of using the elevator where they might have met a late returning tenant or a departing guest, Army Nold made them go down the rear service stairs.

He and one of his hoods and Mike Shayne got into Nold's own car, a late model high

priced sports coupe which had probably been stolen.

Lucy Hamilton and the other young hood were to go in Lucy's own car.

"That's so you don't try anything fancy on the trip," Nold told Mike Shayne. "Even if you got clear away yourself we'd still have your ever-loving little broad, and what we could do to her would make you wish you'd stayed with us. You see how it is?"

"I see how it is," Mike Shayne said.

"Where are we going?" the other hood said. He was in the back seat with his gun in his hand. Nold was driving and Shayne next to him on the driver's seat.

"The boss says take him to the factory," Nold said.

"Why the factory? Why not back to Fat Sam's place, where we can get something to eat?"

"The boss says the factory," Nold said. "One of them cooks or somebody at Fat Sam's must of spilled his mouth about the fight there. The place has been crawling with cops for an hour. They found Georgie all bandaged from burns when big Shayne threw him on the fire or something, so they run him in for questioning. That's the last place any of should show up now."

Somewhat to Mike Shayne's

surprise the factory they had talked about turned out to be exactly that. It was located in the middle of the great expanse of warehouses in the outskirts of Dade County, north and west of Opa Locka.

It was an area of big, new concrete block manufacturing and warehousing buildings. Some were working a night shift so there was traffic still on the roads.

Shayne didn't like the fact that nobody made any effort to blindfold him or keep him from seeing where they were going.

"Probably figure I'll never get out of here alive, so it doesn't make any difference," he told himself. It was a logical, but far from a comforting, conclusion. It didn't help either to see Lucy Hamilton's car following the one in which he rode.

That meant they were both slated for murder.

When they finally got to the factory it was a huge one, covering three or four acres at least and located on the outer fringe of the manufacturing area.

The sign on the front of the plant over the entrance to the office suites read "TROPICAL FURNISHINGS — Custom Lines".

Army Nold didn't stop at that entrance however but

circled around into a large truck parking lot at the rear of the building. Big, long distance trailer trucks were massed here. Some had license plates from the north and western states and bore the painted names of well-known trucking concerns. Most of them, however, had "Tropical Furnishings" painted on their sides.

Mike Shayne noticed that several of the trucks were pulling flatbeds holding the closed "Piggy Back Units" which could be hauled by truck or loaded onto a railroad flatcar. The units were of standard size. Each was a self-contained shipping unit when sealed, sort of a gigantic shipping crate. They could be bolted to a truck bed or railroad flatcar and transferred from one to the other by big loading cranes.

There were also standard truck bodies, small pick-ups and a few cars that probably belonged to employees.

A big loading dock ran across the rear of the factory building but the overhead doors behind it were pulled down and bolted or locked, since no night shift was working here. There was a tough looking watchman on the loading dock, but he recognized Army Nold and made no effort to stop or question them.



LUCY HAMILTON

Across the parking lot, as a sort of extended wing to the factory building itself, was a large service garage for handling the big trucks and other company vehicles.

It was to this part of the building that Nold drove and Lucy Hamilton's car followed directly behind.

All of them got out of the two cars close to a door at the side of the service garage area. Nold had a key and motioned them through the door after he had unlocked it.

Nothing was going on in the front of the garage but there was evidently a big space behind the regular service area. Lights showed from behind a high partition and from the sounds a number of mechanics were at work there.

Mike Shayne decided that this must be where the stolen cars were brought to be repainted and have their identifying serial numbers reworked and altered. Legitimate truck service could go on during the day while a special night shift would take care of the hot cars Nold and his boys brought in.

He began to get an idea of how the whole operation could be conducted. He was sure now that they'd never let either Lucy Hamilton or himself get out of this situation alive.

Nold took the two of them through the front office of the garage section and off to some small storage and equipment rooms at the side. One of these had at some time been used as an office. There were desks and chairs and a couple of overhead electric light bulbs. Five gallon cans of automobile enamel paint and some stripped down engine blocks were piled for storage in one end of the room.

Nold switched on the lights and motioned them all into this room.

"We'll wait here," he said.

"The boss will be along in a little while."

He looked around the bare room and grinned. "Might as well make yourselves comfortable, friends."

Lucy Hamilton walked over to one of the desks and sat down on the chair behind it. Both were covered with a layer of dust, but she didn't seem to mind. She kept her eyes on Mike Shayne, ready to take her cue from him. She knew perfectly well that he'd make an effort to get them out of this and, like him, she hadn't any illusions about how serious the situation was.

Shayne went over to the stack of cans of paint against the side wall and leaned his shoulders against it. He watched all of them from that position.

The younger and smaller of Nold's two hoods said suddenly: "Now I really do need a fix. I gotta, Army. I need it bad."

"Go ahead," Nold said. "I guess you got time. You got it with you like always, I suppose?"

"I got it," the hood said. "You bet your cool I got it with me all the time."

There was a small lavatory opening off the old office. The youngster got water from the sink in a chipped tumbler. From one of his pockets he took an ordinary kitchen spoon

with part of the handle broken off, a hypodermic syringe and a small cellophane packet of white powder.

He heated water in the spoon with his cigarette lighter, mixed in the powder and filled his syringe. Then he took off his belt and knotted it around his upper left arm and injected the mixture.

While this was going on the rest of them watched what he was doing with an intense and morbid curiosity. Under the harsh light of the single overhead electric bulb the young hoodlum was like a savage performing some sort of obscure and obscene occult rite.

Even Lucy Hamilton, despite the real danger she knew herself to be in, couldn't take her eyes away from what he was doing.

Only Mike Shayne seemed to retain any sort of independent existence. He kept his eyes turned towards the drug shooter, but not his attention.

The big detective quietly lifted several of the five gallon cans of paint off the stack onto the floor. He sat down on one of them, moving very slowly so as not to distract the hoodlums from their watching of the drug act.

Then he pulled a second can over in front of him and held it between his knees.

They had taken Shayne's

gun out of his belt holster back at Lucy Hamilton's apartment, but otherwise he hadn't even been searched. Now he took a ring of metal keys out of one trouser pocket and began to use one of them to pry loose the top of the paint can.

He knew exactly what he was about and his hands were very strong. It was only a minute before he had the lid so loose that it was resting on the top of the can.

Without changing expression, Shayne pushed the first paint can a bit to one side and began to work on a second. Not even Lucy Hamilton noticed what he was doing.

The young man across the room pulled the hypodermic needle out of his arm. He gave a long, shuddering, almost animal sigh and his whole face relaxed as the powerful narcotic in the blood stream began to take effect on his body and brain.

That seemed to break the spell. Everybody relaxed and began to look around the room.

Mike Shayne's hands now rested on his knees. He was leaning back against the stack of paint cans, looking vacantly up at the ceiling.

"You feel better now?" Nold asked his henchman.

"Man. Man." the other said. "I'm alive again."

Armando Nold said, "Some-

day you ain't gonna be able to get that powder when you need it. Then what you going to do? Then what?"

"I ain't worrying."

There was the sound of a car motor in the yard outside the door. The car stopped and a door opened and slammed shut. There was a staccato rapping on the door.

"That'll be the boss," Nold said. "One of you punks let him in."

The man who came through the door was a stranger to Mike Shayne.

He was big, standing at least six foot two inches in his mod square toed shoes. He wore a bright blue and yellow plaid single-button sport jacket and lilac colored slacks and a silk shirt with an exaggerated collar and a tie so wide it looked like a scarf or a battle flag draped around his neck.

He was mostly bald with a fringe of short, curly black hair at the sides. His face was blue jowled for lack of a needed shave and of an odd triangular shape, tapering down from a broad brow to a small, curiously fragile chin. One cheek had the line of an old knife scar.

His eyes were small and feral like the eyes of a blood-drinking bat.

Army Nold said: "Hello,

Paul. I told you I could pick up this big pig just like going down to the corner for a pack of butts. Easy it was."

"So I see," the man called Paul replied. "How come the broad? I didn't tell you nothing about no broad."

"She's his ever loving," Nold said. "Regular bait to trap this big rat. I knew he'd go to see her sometime so we just got there first and waited for him."

"Don't congratulate yourself too much," Paul said. "As long as you got her along that man is dangerous. He'll kill you before he lets you hurt her. You should of known better."

Army Nold wagged the shotgun. "He ain't going to bother nobody."

To his boys: "One of you go out to the shop and bring back one of them acetylene torches."

"What do you want with that?" Paul asked him.

"I figured we're gonna have to have words with this big pig," Nold said in surprise. "He's got papers he took from Fat Sam. If we cook his broad's feet a little or maybe burn a picture on her someplace, I figure he'll tell us where they are."

"That won't be necessary," Paul said.

It was a shock to all of them, and about the last thing Mike Shayne had expected to hear.

He had to fight hard to keep his usual poker face.

"What the hell," Nold blurted out. "I thought that was the whole idea bringing them up here. I thought—"

"That's the trouble with a punk like you," Paul said. "Ever so often one of you gets the idea he wants to think. You ain't made for it. You had oughta leave it to your betters."

"I don't think I like that."

"Did I ask you to like it?"

Nold was on the verge of exploding, but he held himself in. "Okay then. Okay. How do the big brains like you figure to find out where them papers are?"

What Paul said next was a real shocker to Mike Shayne.

"Relax. We already know where the papers are. We can pick them up any damn time we please."

"Oh," Nold said. "Then what are we all here for, a coffee break? What do we do next?"

"The next thing we do is kill this shamus and his lady-fair," Paul said. "He knows too much by now. Besides he's too dangerous to have alive."

He turned to Shayne. "You can understand that, Shayne. We ain't got any choice."

"You could try bribing me," the big detective said. He was playing for time.

"You don't bribe, Shayne," Paul said. "Everybody in Miami knows that much about you. You always been an honest shamus like an honest cop. As a matter of fact it's going to cost you your life. You can see I ain't got no choice, can't you?"

"What are we flamethrowing about?" Nold said. He lifted the shotgun. "Let's get it over with."

"Not that way," Paul said. "Somebody in the garage might hear that cannon go off." He turned to the two young hoods. "One of you go get a crowbar or something. We beat their skulls in and ship them out with the next can of cars. Let somebody in South America put the bodies in a river."

The drug shooting hood was sitting on a desk with vacant, blissful eyes. The other one left the room.

"Who's going to do the killing?" Army Nold asked.

"Nobody," Mike Shayne said suddenly so that they all jumped at the sound of his voice.

VIII

THEY'D JUST been taking the big detective for granted. Mike Shayne hadn't done anything or even said anything so far and he'd deliberately assumed a protective coloration

of inaction like a chameleon on a bush so that they weren't prepared for him to suddenly assume an independent role.

That gave him the small edge that could make the difference between life and death.

Shayne threw the contents of a five gallon can of automobile paint over Army Nold with a single swift and sure motion. The heavy liquid hit Nold in the face and covered him from head to foot before he really knew what was going on. He was blinded and there was even paint in his mouth where he'd opened it to yell. For all practical purposes he was out of action.

In almost the same instant Shayne flipped the second heavy can at the big man they called Paul.

"It wasn't nearly as good a throw. The paint hit Paul above the knees, knocking him backwards. Some of it ruined the forty-dollar slacks he wore and, more importantly, some spilled on the floor. His feet slipped and skidded in the liquid.

Nold managed to fire both barrels of his sawed off shotgun. He couldn't see anything of course and the loads exploded two more of the big cans of paint in the stack.

One way or another the whole room was turning a fire-engine red.

Big Paul was a fighting man himself. He was clawing for the thirty-eight police-positive he wore in a shoulder holster. He was fast, but he hadn't expected to draw and was off balance. The expensive sports jacket got in his way.

Then Mike Shayne was across the intervening space and bringing up a looping right hand swing from the ankles. It came close to breaking Paul's neck.

An instant later Shayne's feet hit the paint on the floor and shot out from under him. He managed to break the fall by landing on the already prostrate form of Paul. He could feel one of the man's ribs snap under his weight.

He rolled clear and sat up. Somehow he'd gotten Paul's gun out of the spring holster and into his own hand while he was down on top of the prostrate man.

He swung to cover Armando Nold's young hood.

Shayne didn't have to shoot. When the action had exploded Lucy Hamilton had gone into motion too. Before the hood could really grasp what was going on she had slipped off one of her shoes and swung the heel against his temple.

As far as the hood was concerned it was like being hit by a blackjack. The world exploded into stars and pin-

wheels as he went out of the fight.

By the time Shayne got up Lucy had the youngster's gun in one hand and the big forty-five he had taken from the detective back at her apartment in the other.

It was at that moment that Army Nold's other pal came back into the room from the factory yard, carrying a heavy iron crowbar in his hand.

He took one look around the shambles that the storage room had become.

His friends were all down on the floor under a sheet of mixed crimson paint and blood. There were three guns pointed in his own direction.

First his mouth fell open. Then he let the crowbar fall to the floor with a crash. Then he put his hands up over his head.

At a nod from the big redhead Lucy Hamilton went over and relieved him of his gun and motioned him to go over and stand by his prostrate friends.

Only then did she turn and smile at Shayne.

"I knew you'd think of something, Michael," she said.

"So did I," Shayne said. "At least I was pretty sure I would. They meant business about killing us, I think."

He paused and took a deep breath. Then he grinned back at



his beautiful ally. "I don't mind admitting though, Angel, for a while there I was wondering whether I'd be able to come up with something in time."

"You made it," she said. "What do we do now? Take these men in and give them to Will Gentry, I suppose?"

"No," Shayne said. "We haven't got time for that. Let's tie them up and leave them here in the dark back of a locked door. They'll keep. There's more important things to do right now. I don't like the way this Paul character talked about knowing where the missing papers were."

"If he knows, he knows more than I do," Lucy Hamilton said. She was using belts and strips torn from their sport shirts to tie up the two younger hoodlums while Shayne did the same for the paint smeared and unresisting Armando Nold. Paul was breathing hard as if he had suffered a concussion and wasn't about to come to for a while.

"What are these papers and where are they?" she asked.

"They're important evidence," Shayne said, "and I left them with Tim Rourke. If these characters really know that, they'll be sending somebody to pick them up. I don't want Tim getting hurt."

He left the prostrate Nold and went to tie up Paul.

"If he's the boss," Lucy Hamilton said, indicating Paul, "shouldn't we at least take him along? He'd fit in the trunk of my car."

"He's small stuff," Shayne said. "Not the big boss. Let's go, Angel."

IX

THEY turned out the light in the storage room and locked the door from the outside. It would be a long time before anyone thought to open that door and meantime Mike

Shayne expected to wind up the case and send the police.

He slid behind the wheel of Lucy Hamilton's car and drove away from the plant yard. At the gate the tough looking watchman gave them a curious look but made no move to interfere.

It was a couple of miles before Shayne spotted a glass-enclosed pay telephone booth beside the road. As soon as he did he pulled over and dialed Tim Rourke's home phone. Although he let it ring for several minutes, there was no answer.

Then he dialed the *Miami News*.

"Mr. Rourke isn't in his office, Mr. Shayne," he was told. "We really don't expect him in tonight."

"If he does come in, tell him to stay right there until he hears from me."

Back at the car Shayne told Lucy Hamilton: "I'm worried. I know Tim wasn't planning to go anywhere tonight. That's why I left that Claire woman with him overnight for sake-keeping. He should be there, and when he's home it's not like him not to answer the phone. He's a newsman and anytime the phone rings it could be a story for him."

Lucy tried to make light of it. "That's probably the answer.

He got a call about an important story and had to go out to cover it. You'll see."

"Then why wouldn't Claire Allen answer?"

"Because he'd tell her not to. After all the call wouldn't be for her if nobody but you knew she was there, would it? Or maybe she didn't want anybody to know she was there. After being trailed and picked up at her friends—"

"I've got an idea," Shayne said, "and I don't like it. We better get on down to Tim's as fast as we can."

The car picked up speed.

At the big condominium building where Tim Rourke lived the doorman stopped Mike Shayne and Lucy Hamilton in the lobby.

"Mr. Shayne, if you're looking for Mr. Rourke, he's gone out."

"Out?"

"Yes sir, but he left a message for you in case you should come by."

"Yes?"

"It was for you to go on up to the apartment and wait for him, sir. He left a key, or least the man with him gave me the key for you to let yourself in. He said there'd be a phone call. You were to wait. He'd call—Mr. Rourke that is—and tell you where he'd gone."

The man took a key out of his pocket and held it out.

Mike Shayne took it from him. "What's this about a man with Rourke? Didn't he speak to you himself?"

"Well, no he didn't, sir. There was a woman with him and two men I never saw before tonight. It was one of the men, the little one, who gave me the key and the message. I'm sure everything's allright though. Mr. Rourke was standing right there where he could hear every word. He didn't object to anything."

Mike Shayne looked even more tired than usual. He was sick now with more than the winter flu. "I'm sure he didn't. Now tell me, what did this little man look like? Can you remember?"

"I remember all right. If you don't mind my saying, not like Mr. Rourke's usual friends. I'm sure—"

"I understand," Shayne said. "Now about the little fellow? Natty dresser would you say?"

The doorman looked shocked. "Natty? Oh no sir. Rather I'd say flashy. That's the word. Expensive clothes but everything wrong. Everything."

Shayne couldn't keep from laughing. "I know. And his face?"

"His face, Mr. Shayne," the doorman said, "Is a mean and

cruel face. If you don't mind my using the word, sir, it was an evil face. That's the only word will fit: A downright evil face I'd have to call it."

"I'm afraid I understand," Shayne said. "I think I know the man and that's the word for him. Well, I guess we'll go on up to Mr. Rourke's like he wanted."

He gave the doorman a five dollar bill. "If you see that little man come in while we're here, call me on the house phone. Quietly, so he won't know."

The man nodded.

Shayne took Lucy Hamilton into the self service elevator.

"I knew things were wrong. That was Killi-killy Morton he was describing. They must have come here and gotten Tim and the woman."

"But how would they know to come here?" Lucy asked.

"I'm afraid I can guess," Shayne said, "but that doesn't really matter right now. The thing is that they did know. That Paul wasn't talking through his hat. What I don't understand though is why they took Tim out of here alive, and what that business of me waiting for a phone call is all about."

He used the key Tim Rourke had left to let them both into the luxurious apartment.

First he made a quick but

professional search of the premises. Somebody else had searched them first. Clothes and the contents of desk and dresser drawers were turned out; mattresses had been ripped open. The place was a shambles.

"Tim's going to have to replace most of his stuff," Shayne said. "I'll try to get the insurance people who put me on this case to foot the bill. That is I will if and when I clean it up for them."

Lucy was looking at the mess, appalled.

"Tim must have hidden the papers you left with him," she said.

"Morton wasn't hunting Easter eggs and that's for sure," Shayne said. "They must have waltzed in here expecting Rourke to be sitting there reading the papers or something, but he'd already stashed them. They had to really mine this place. The fact they took Tim when they left makes me think they hadn't found what they were looking for. They want to work him over and make him talk, and they're taking him to a safer place to do that."

"Maybe," Lucy Hamilton said. She had a very grave look on her face. "Michael, you don't think they just took Tim and that woman to do what they planned to do to us?"

"To kill them, you mean, Angel?" Shayne said with equal gravity. "That's a possibility, at least when they get what they want. I don't think that was the main reason, though."

"For one thing, if that was it there wouldn't have been any point in leaving a message about a phone call to me. I think they'll keep Tim alive as a hold on me. Of course when they left that message I don't think they knew you and I had already been captured and escaped. I think Paul or whoever sent Morton here before he knew Army Nold had us."

"What do you expect from a phone call then?" Lucy Hamilton asked.

"If Tim doesn't tell them where those papers are, then they'll call me to trade the papers for his life," Shayne said. "That is they'll call here and hope I answer."

"Shouldn't we call the police?" she asked. "At least have Will Gentry call the sheriff's people to raid that factory and pick up Paul and Nold?"

"Not while they still have Tim," Shayne said. "That might get Tim killed for sure. No. For now about all we can do is wait and see if a call comes."

"Not quite all," Lucy said with sudden decision. "You



aren't well, Michael. I'm going to see what I can find in Tim's medicine cabinet that might help you. While I'm doing that I want you to find some warm, dry clothes. That suit you're wearing is a mess. Come daylight you couldn't wear it out on the street without getting picked up."

Shayne looked down at himself. What she'd said was perfectly true. The suit he wore had been soaked by the afternoon rain. It was fouled and spotted by grease and gravy from the fight at Fat Sam's place. There were splashes of red paint on the pants legs and on his sturdy shoes. Somewhere along the line the left sleeve of the jacket had been ripped in a jagged triangle above the elbow.

He started searching through Tim's dressers and closets.

Fortunately he found an old pair of sports slacks of his own that he'd left with Tim Rourke at some time in the past. He put on with it a warm knitted sports shirt. The collar wouldn't button and it stretched too tightly across the chest, but it was warm and dry.

He located a pull-over sweater vest and an old topcoat with Raglan shoulders. It wouldn't button across his barrel chest, but it was warm and considerable improvement over his own soiled and ruined jacket.

He put his own gun back in its belt holster. Then he tucked one of the snub-nosed thirty-eights they'd taken from Army Nold's friends under his belt on the left side front, where the sweater and topcoat would hide it.

By this time Lucy Hamilton had strong hot coffee ready, with scrambled eggs and toast.

Shayne ate like a hungry wolf.

She also had aspirin and an antihistamine capsule of a popularly advertised brand that she'd found in the medicine cabinet.

The big man took these gratefully. He had a sinus headache clear across the brow ridge, a runny nose and a throat that was getting more dry and sore by the hour. The muscles

that sheathed his big frame were sore and sick feeling.

Within a few minutes though the food and medication were making him feel better. He topped them off with a double slug of brandy from a bottle of his favorite label. Then he really did begin to relax.

They ate looking out the picture window of the apartment. It faced the black waters of Biscayne Bay. Beyond them the high, shimmering Chinese Wall of towering hotels and condominiums that was Miami Beach. Though it was nearly two o'clock in the morning the lights of windows, and street signs made the whole line of the Beach a wall of shimmering sparks of light. The causeways across the Bay were like shimmering, glowing necklaces of moving lights as the cars of late revelers and vacationers sped back and forth.

"It looks so beautiful and peaceful," Lucy Hamilton said softly.

"Don't I wish it was," Shayne said.

"If they call you," Lucy asked him then, "what are we going to do?"

"We aren't going to do anything, Angel," the big man said and poured himself another shot of the fine brandy. "You're going to stay right here

with the other thirty-eight we got from Army's boy with the front and rear doors to this place locked and bolted.

"You aren't to open up to anybody at all unless you know them and know you can trust them. If you get any phone call supposed to be a message from me, you pay no attention to it at all. Even if I call and you recognize my voice, don't pay attention unless I stutter on the first and last word of every sentence. That'll tell you nobody's got a gun at my head."

"Suppose you run into something worse than you figure on, Michael? I mean suppose you're really in trouble you can't handle? What then?"

"I won't be. I never have been and I won't this time," the big man said.

"Oh, I believe you, Michael. But just suppose—"

"Okay, Angel, let me put it this way. If I'm not back by noon tomorrow—or you haven't had a message you know you can trust from me or Tim Rourke then you call Will Gentry. Tell him everything you know."

It was then that the apartment phone rang shrilly.

X

"HERE WE go," Michael Shayne said.

He picked the instrument out of its cradle.

"Shayne here," he said.

The voice that answered wasn't one that he recognized. All he could tell was that it was a man's.

"Since you answer this call, Mr. Shayne," it said smoothly, "I'm sure you know that we have your friend Rourke."

"You can't keep him," Shayne said. "I'm telling you now to turn him loose."

"Don't be a fool, Shayne." the voice continued. "This is no time for joking. We had hoped that Rourke would prove cooperative, but unfortunately for himself he's chosen to be stubborn instead."

"Anybody who knows him could have told you that," Shayne said to the voice.

"Stop trying to bandy words," the voice said. "We asked Rourke to give us certain papers or tell us where they are. He has refused."

"My heart bleeds for you," Shayne said.

"It had better bleed for Rourke, Mr. Shayne. You are going to bring us those papers, and within the hour. Otherwise we will cut Mr. Rourke's throat and put his body in the Bay. Do you understand me? We mean exactly what we say. We don't fool, my friend."

"How do I know Tim

Rourke hasn't already been killed?"

"That's a fair question. Hang on and we'll let him speak to you himself."

After a moment of silence Mike Shayne heard the familiar voice of his friend.

"Mike, don't pay any attention to what these punks are saying. I'll be okay. Stay away from here and call Will—"

The voice broke off and there were sounds of a brief scuffle. Then the voice of the original caller was back on the line again:

"I'm sure you won't listen to that foolishness, Mr. Shayne. Are you satisfied that was Rourke speaking?"

"That was Tim," Shayne said.

"All right then. This is what you are to do. Put the papers we want in your pocket. Drive up the Boulevard to a night club called the Green Pigeon. You know it?"

"I know where it is."

"When you get there leave your car in the parking lot. Go inside and sit in the first vacant booth you come to. Someone will meet you there and bring you to where we have Mr. Rourke. It will be someone who can identify himself as coming from us. Do you have that?"

"I have it."

"When you have given us the

papers we want, Mr. Shayne, we will let you and Rourke go free. We will make a trade—your lives for what we want."

"I hear you," Shayne said. He heard the voice, but of course he didn't believe what was said.

"Good. Now just one more thing. Come alone. Come unarmed and above all don't notify the police. If you violate any one of those conditions, the whole deal is off."

The line went dead.

Shayne hung up the instrument and turned to Lucy Hamilton. "That's the call. Just as I've thought they have Tim, but they haven't managed to get their hands on the papers. I'm to go to them."

"What on earth makes those papers so important?" Lucy asked.

"They name the firms who get the stolen cars in South America. When our authorities give that information to the local police down there, they can smash the whole operation. They can't have that. This outfit takes only premium type merchandise, top name cars in near-new condition, and they sell them for four or five times what a dealer could get for the same wheels new here in the States. The insurance companies are paying out millions a year in claims on this, and

that's just a small percentage of what this crowd takes in."

He paused for a minute in thought. "They'll kill anybody they have to to keep this gravy train rolling."

"You're sure there's no chance they'll keep their word about letting you and Tim go?" Lucy Hamilton asked. She knew the answer before she asked.

"They can't afford to let us go," Shayne said. "Tim and I have read those papers. We remember the names. Besides I don't know what Tim did with the papers. I couldn't give them back if I wanted to."

"That means?"

"Angel, it means I have to go up there and take the ball away from their side to save Tim. That means find out if I'm as good as Morton."

It was characteristic that neither of them thought for a single moment of calling in the authorities and abandoning Tim Rourke in order to save Shayne's life.

"Can you take him?" she asked. "You're sick tonight and you've already been through a rough time."

Shayne shrugged. He said: "I can take him. The worst day I ever had I can take him."

The big detective drove north on the Boulevard past the 79th Street Causeway to the

Beach, past the cluster of big name steak houses around 125th Street, and past the stretch of jungle greenery that interrupted a solid blaze of neon at Greynolds Park.

He hadn't actually any more of a plan than just to "take the ball away from their side." Shayne thought best on his feet when his mind moved at lightning speed and his body responded with a panther like ferocity. Under pressure he could usually stay at least one jump ahead of an opponent. It was a quality that had saved his life on many occasions.

Before leaving he'd stuffed an envelope full of blank copy paper into his breast pocket to represent the missing papers. He'd left his big gun in its holster, knowing they'd take it, but shifted the snubnosed thirty-eight to the inside of his left pants leg, where the sock cradled the barrel and a garter held the butt.

If they found that gun too, he'd be disarmed, but the odds were already so long against him that he didn't really worry.

The Green Pigeon Dance Hall was a clip joint, and a third rate joint at that. Paint peeled off the outer walls, revealed in the stark neon light from a sign that said: "GIRLS . . . GIRLS . . . GIRLS . . ." and left the viewer to imagine what the

girls were there to do for him.

Shayne went in through heavy double doors. The carpet under foot was scuffed and worn, the lights were dim, mostly red and blue bulbs. When he sat down the top of the table in the booth was spotted with grease and spilled liquor stain.

There were only three customers, each with a house girl at his table.

The big man hadn't long to wait. The curtains closing off a doorway at the rear of the bar parted and a woman came through and walked directly to his booth.

When she sat down opposite him Shayne grinned at her in the dim and scabrous light.

"Hello, Claire," he said. "I had an idea it might be you since you'd already mentioned this place."

She said: "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. What could I do? They caught me again when they came for Mr. Rourke and they threatened me. What can I do???"

"I don't really care, Claire," he said, "but you and I both know it isn't like that. The only way they knew to come snatch Tim Rourke was that you managed somehow to tip them off. Unless you told them they'd never have known to

search his place for those papers. That's right, isn't it?"

"No," she said. "No. They threatened me. They—"

"You've been working for them all along," Shayne said.

She saw that he meant it and went white under her make-up. "What are you going to do?"

"If I was like your friend Morton I'd kill you just for the kicks I'd get out of it. I'm not. I won't do anything to you but go along wherever you're supposed to take me. I just wanted you to know."

"It ain't personal," she said. "Nothing against you or Mr. Rourke. They don't even pay me much. It's just they'd kill me if I didn't work for them."

"I know," Mike Shayne said. "I know. How many of them are there where I'm going?"

She was afraid of the quiet, steely eyed giant across the table. Besides she wanted to propitiate him with the sure instinct of her kind. "Only three that you have to worry about. Killi-killy Morton and two others. Then there's the boss. And me of course."

He grinned at her. "Who's the boss, Claire?"

"Oh no. I daren't tell you that. I can't. They'd know I told you and kill me for sure. That Morton likes to kill people like me. I can't tell."

"It's all right," Shayne said.



"You don't have to tell me. I know that, too. I know all the things they want to hide like how they ship the cars. So don't worry. Now, take me where I'm supposed to go and keep out of my way when we get there. That's all you have to do."

She led him outside the Green Pigeon to Lucy Hamilton's car, which he'd driven up in.

"Get in. You're going to drive."

Shayne slid into the driver's seat.

That's when the young man with the gun came quietly out of the shadows. He could have been first cousin to Army Nold's boys. The gun was held in a steady hand.

"He has a gun in a belt holster," he said to Claire. "Get it and give it to me." She did. "Now see if he has another hid out on him."

Claire patted Shayne's pockets and under his arms and around his belt. She never thought to reach under the wheel around his ankles.

The young hood got in the back seat of the car where he could keep Shayne covered with his gun. He gave the directions where the detective should drive.

The house they drove to was all of ten miles south of the

Green Pigeon, but also located on Highway U.S. 1. It was one of the remaining old mansions on Brickel Avenue that hadn't yet been torn down to make way for a high-rise office or apartment building.

The place sat near the Bay, masked from the street by trees and shrubbery.

It was Killi-killy Morton who opened the door for them. He grinned up at Mike Shayne, who stood at least a foot and a half taller.

"I been waitin' for you, b-b-b-b-big man," he said. "You and me got b-b-b-business tonight." He probably thought he was smiling but his face was an evil and cruel mask.

"Sure, shrimp," Shayne said. "I got business with your boss first though."

"You know who I am?" Morton asked.

"Sure. You're K-k-k-killi or is it K-k-k-katy?" Shayne wanted the little man angry enough to be off balance.

Morton spat on the marble floor and silently led the way into the library of the old mansion. There was another young hood there with a gun. There was also someone standing behind the velvet drapes which closed off a window alcove.

"Put the p-p-p-papers on that table," the little killer said.

"Not till I see Tim Rourke," Shayne said. "I mean it."

One of the hoods went to the back of the house and returned with the ace news writer. Rourke had been beaten and his face was bruised but he managed a lopsided grin at his friend.

"You shouldn't have come, Mike."

"Somebody has to look after you," Shayne said. "So here we all are. You might as well come out in the open now, Sam."

The curtains parted and Fat Sam Vamuels came out, his face crimson with rage.

"It had to be you," Shayne said. "With all that money to be skimmed you wouldn't be willing to be anyone else's errand boy. Besides I remember seeing your name in the paper as Chairman of the Board of *Tropical Furnishings*. That clinched it for me when I remembered that."

"You know it all," Fat Sam said.

"You might say that, Sam," Shayne told him. "I know how you run this racket now. You have punks like Armando Nold steal the wheels and mechanics work them over at the factory maintenance garages after hours. Then you put them in those piggy-back self-contained shipping units I saw in the yard—along with some furni-

ture, of course. The units go by truck to Port Everglades or Jacksonville or Mobile or wherever. Cranes load the piggy-backs, still sealed of course, onto freighters bound for your friends in South America."

"You know too much," Fat Sam said. "Did you bring the papers?"

Shayne tossed him the envelope from his pocket.

Fat Sam ripped it open and saw the blank paper. He turned to Morton. "You can have your fun now. Take these bums up to the attic and stuff them in a couple of the old trunks lying around up there. Then shoot them both in the head and throw the trunks in Biscayne Bay."

They marched Shayne and Rourke out of the library. There was a wide flight of marble stairs going up to the second floor hall. It was flanked with a wide baluster of Honduras Mahogany.

Morton motioned them to go up. He and one of his hoods were right behind. Fat Sam and Claire Allen and the other hood watched from the foot of the stairs.

Shayne waited till he was almost at the top of the stairs before he made his move. When he did it was almost too fast for the eye to follow. With his left

hand he knocked Tim Rourke flat on the stairs.

At the same instant he jumped to his right so as to straddle the smooth mahogany balustrade and went sliding down.

His weight gave him speed and he shot off with enough force for his two extended feet to take Fat Sam and the young hood with him high on the chest and knock them sprawling and slipping across the slick marble floor.

Shayne twisted as he fell and somehow clawed out the thirty-eight from under his pants leg. He lay flat on the floor and held the gun in both hands. His elbows were braced on the floor so he could hold the gun steady.

The young hood on the stairs never really knew what happened. He tried to watch Rourke and turn at the same time and fell over his own feet.

Killi-killy Morton was a real pro. He was twisted round and ready to fire almost as fast as Shayne. Almost. That made the difference.

Shayne had known what he was doing and Morton was still a step behind. That gave the big man the edge he had to have to live.

Shayne's bullets smashed into the killer's chest and shoulders and brought him

down, wounded and screaming on the stairs. The gun fell from his hand.

None of the others had any fight left to face the big man with the steel hard eyes and the leveled gun.

"The one thing I'd like to know," Shayne said to Tim Rourke later on, when the house was full of Will Gentry's homicide squad, "is how you managed to hide out those papers on them. From the looks of your place they gave it as good a search as I could have done myself."

"Easy," Tim Rourke said. "I

didn't trust that Claire you left with me. When she sneaked in the bedroom I listened at the door and heard her make a phone call, I couldn't hear what she said, but I guessed she was selling us out. I put the papers in an envelope while she was still in there and addressed it to you and dropped it down the mail slot in the hall. You'll get it by tomorrow with luck. That is, if the post office is on time."

Mike Shayne said: "Oh."

"Any time you need a partner," Tim Rourke said, "simply make me an offer."



Mike Shayne Leads the November Issue With —

THE MAFIA PAYS A RANSOM

A New Complete Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Louie the Canary had squealed to the fuzz. It was his last song. Now he was dead, a bloody thing without a heart. Could Mike Shayne find his killer—and save the Mafia leader's little boy from the same fate.

My Brother

*Only one knew my dark secret.
And—he would never tell...*

by
TREVOR BLACK



IT'S BEEN three days now since Cindy O'Hara was killed. It doesn't seem that long, Jonathan, but time flies by as I get older. As we get older, Jonathan.

The police have come, of course. Several times, in fact. They put on their honest faces when they come to talk to me. I hear statements about "duty" and "questions that have to be asked" and so I listen and I respond and they finally go away.

As you should know, ten days have passed since Sheriff Kilmer first came by. He's very tall, even more so than Uncle Mac, and I think he's unusually proud of the gun he wears at his hip. When he moves he seems to protect the weapon and I've heard he once went all the way to Africa to kill something with a bigger gun.

When he entered the den ten days ago, I was waiting for him. I sat in the brown, leather-covered chair and watched as he stood above me looking rather odd and uncomfortable as though he wondered what he was doing in the house at all.

"Phillip?" he asked me.

"Yes?"

"Is it Phil? Is it all right if I call you Phil?"

"All right, if you'd like."

Kilmer finally sat down, pulling the chair closer so he

could hear me. He asked about Mom and Dad and I told him they'd been dead for years and Uncle Mac was taking care of us until we finished school.

The sheriff let me talk, watching me carefully, and then he said, "Where's your brother, Phil?"

He didn't say dumb brother, Jonathan, but that's what he meant. He paused long enough for me to know that's what he meant exactly.

"I don't know. He's outside somewhere."

"John, isn't it?"

"Jonathan. My brother likes to be called Jonathan."

"Oh."

He sat there trying to figure out a lie to tell so he could get what he wanted out of me.

"What about my brother?"

"I'd like to talk to him. A fourteen-year-old girl's been killed."

The way he said it upset me. He made you sound guilty already.

"And you think my brother did it?" I asked him. "Why? Why do you think such things? Why does everyone think such things about Jonathan?"

He smiled, but it really wasn't a smile at all.

Shelley Sanderlay. That's the girl he was talking about.

She'd been murdered and someone told Sheriff Kilmer

you knew her and right away he came to get you. Without a second thought.

Of course you knew her! She often laughed at you, made fun of you as you got on the state bus—the one with bars on the windows because it's also used to transport prisoners—the bus which takes you to the special school.

The freak school, Shelley called it. I could see how she hurt you, Jonathan. You never could hide things like that from me. Only I truly understand how a brother with an I.Q. of 60 can be affected by the cruel words of a small, unthinking girl.

If only you hadn't hit her that one time. Do you remember? I do. You rushed at her, crying and screaming so loud no one could understand you and I needed help to force you away from her. The crowd stared at you and that made you cry even more. Finally, I had to lead you away.

And when Shelley Sanderlay died, when they found her slashed and butchered, they thought about you, Jonathan. They needed someone to blame and they came for my brother.

Naturally.

Four days later the situation became worse. It became worse, as you remember, because they found Pat Dietz beneath the



scarecrow in the middle of Kramer's deserted farmyard.

The police, Sheriff Kilmer, returned to our home.

He was insistent this time. He wanted you, and immediately.

"Jonathan isn't here."

"Where is he?"

"You've scared him off."

"I've scared him off? What's he so scared of?" Sheriff Kilmer reminded me, in that brief moment, of a man who wanted to kill something. Anything.

"People," I said. "That's what my brother's afraid of. He doesn't trust them. He thinks you want to run him down and

trap him like an animal and maybe kill him before he can say a word. Would you do that, Sheriff?"

He glared at me. And then, "You are the smart one in the family, aren't you, Phil? Well, just keep on bein' smart. I'm goin' out and find me a murderer! I'll get my dogs and we'll find him and when we do—"

The sheriff stopped, realizing what he was about to say. Neither of us spoke until Kilmer nodded, saying, "I'm going to bring him in, Phillip."

"I won't help you. Not one bit."

"No. I don't suppose you will."

"He's my brother."

"I understand."

"No," I said, shaking my head. "You don't understand at all."

And he didn't, of course. He had no way of knowing you knew Pat Dietz quite well. You knew her through me because Pat and I had dated off and on through three years of high school. I always thought Pat understood you, Jonathan. Until that day we remember so well.

The day it rained.

We were just sitting in the house, all three of us, and you were drawing on the floor and Pat and I were watching from

the sofa. You drew a picture of a horse and Pat laughed. I didn't understand. I asked her what was funny.

She pointed at the picture. "It's your brother, silly. Jonathan! Pay attention now!"

You looked up. I remember your face. You were smiling happily because you liked Pat. You liked her very much.

"Jonathan," she said, "you've tried to draw a horse but it looks more like a donkey. It is a donkey! And you sure know all about donkeys, don't you, Jonathan?—From—your school. Your special little donkey school."

You stopped smiling, Jonathan. And Pat stopped laughing abruptly. She was suddenly quite afraid.

She could see your face.

Pat died, was killed, and three more days went by. They searched and searched for you and I wouldn't tell them where you were. I couldn't do that. Not to my brother. Never.

Then, in town, Mrs. Vergara saw you as you ran down an alley. She saw something smeared all over the front of you, something bright. Something red.

She went to investigate. And screamed. She'd found Cindy O'Hara, the third girl killed within a week. It was messy and everyone made a fuss and said

there was a maniac loose and the police had better find Jonathan, the stupid maniac, before he killed all the nice young girls in town.

Cindy O'Hara. A nice young girl. Sure.

How the people can forget about Cindy I'll never understand. She failed in anything she ever tried to do. She had no friends; she had many enemies.

You were her enemy, Jonathan:

You tried to make friends with her because you could sense people avoided her much like yourself. Your efforts were laughed at again. It's amazing to me how many people in this world laugh at something or someone they fail to understand. It makes no sense, none at all. Especially when, as Cindy did, you hurt other people by your ignorant laughter.

Of course you were frustrated and mad. You came to me crying and I held you and you told me all about it and I was nearly struck dumb myself in my inability to do anything for you.

My brother. My own brother and there was nothing I could do. Everything you did, everything I did; it all resulted in the same thing.

People laughed.

Oh, in a way, they accept me easily enough. I get the best

grades in school so some of them like me for my brain, but not very many really want me as a friend, as a person. After all, I'm the guy with the dumb, weird brother.

And so, as I held you, as you sobbed, it came to me what had to be done. It was so clear that I had to look at it closely to see if I was overlooking something, if I had come upon something too obvious.

I hadn't.

So they died. Just like that, Jonathan. We talked about it and you eventually agreed with me. You nodded your head and clung to me. As your brother, I was deciding for both of us.

They had to die immediately. Why wait? So we did it. As you watched, I took my knife and, one by one, the people who had taunted you, who had laughed at us, I took care of them.

It bothered me not at all.

But now, as I slip out of the bedroom window, onto the damp ground, into the middle of the night, I have a problem.

You, Jonathan. You're my problem.

You ran when I did what had to be done to Cindy and you were crying. Crying and yelling and muttering things to yourself. You needed to run away so I let you. I knew where you were going—into the forest, returning to the isolated cabin where we played as children—so you just disappeared.

But now, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if you can keep what you know within you. I'm not positive that if you're found you can keep our secret silent. And you must, of course.

And the reason I can't be sure of you, my brother, is the fact that you are dumb, you know. I've known that for as long as we've both been boys growing up together. You are my brother but you are so very stupid.

So, as I run across this open field and the cold wind whips against me, I must take measures; I find them necessary. I'm coming, Jonathan.

I'm coming to get you.



Coming Soon: Another **TREVOR BLACK** Thriller

MAJORCAN



ASSIGNMENT

*The kid with the green eyes watched me coming, and the girl beside him froze.
"We need the poke bad, man," he said.
He turned and I saw the long knife...*

by BILL PRONZINI

THE BALEARIC island of Majorca, ninety miles from the southern coast of Spain, lay basking in the cobalt blue of the Mediterranean like a huge amulet reflecting the golden light of the sun. Far below us, under the port wing of the Iberian Airlines jet from New York, I could see a jagged, pine-covered mountain range running along the western peninsula; deep green valleys and terraced hills and sheer cliffs falling away to small inlets and strips of white beach.

The dun-colored architecture of Palma came into view then, as we banked low over the Mediterranean and began our landing approach. It was interspersed with modern, steel-and-glass office and apartment buildings. Ringing the wide

sweep of the boat-dotted harbor were dozens of high-rise luxury hotels. I sat with my nose pressed to the window glass like a kid, and pretty soon the dusty tan of Son San Juan Airport appeared ahead of us. I watched the gray asphalt of the runway rushing up to meet us, and felt the jar as the wheels touched down.

Well, I thought, here you are, guy. *Sin Island, the playground of Europe, home of the jet set and the idle rich. Wine, women, and a year-round mean temperature of sixty-five degrees. Are the stories they tell true? Or is it all a massive hoax perpetrated by the Spanish Government to induce tourist trade?*

As we rolled up to a complete stop near the ter-

minal, I wondered if my bank account was sturdy enough to stand three or four days at one of those luxury hotels I had seen from the air. If everything went well in Palma Nova, and there was really no reason why it shouldn't, I would be on my own in about two hours; and the return trip ticket to San Francisco, in my coat pocket, was paid for and good any time.

Well, why not? A couple of days of lying in the sun, watching bronzed and bikini-clad pulchritude cavorting in the sand wasn't too much of a vacation to give myself. After all, the chances were I'd never have another opportunity like this one.

I was still a little disbelieving of my good fortune on the matter which had brought me to Majorca. Yesterday morning, I had been sitting in my office on Taylor Street, staring out the window at a threatening San Francisco sky and wondering why the Indian summer we had been promised wasn't putting in an appearance, when this lawyer named Bathsgate called and wanted to know if I had a currently valid passport, and if so, would I be available for a job which entailed some traveling.

I said I had a passport I had taken out a couple of years before for a prospective but

ultimately abortive trip to Central America, and that I was available, all right, depending on what the job was. He gave me an address up on Russian Hill and told me I would be expected within the hour.

The address turned out to be one of those imposing, turn-of-the-century mansions, clinging majestically to the fog-shrouded hill. A butler who must have been eighty and had skin like fine old parchment let me in, and conducted me up a marble staircase and into a darkened bedroom.

The man lying propped up in the bed was about sixty, with haggard gray features and sunken cheeks and eyes that had known a lot of pain. A wheelchair, faintly grim in its emptiness, sat beside the bed on the far side. The butler gave my name, and then went out, and the man in the bed said, "I am Millard Frost."

It surprised me a little. Millard Frost was a millionaire several times over, a dominant figure in West Coast shipping for more than forty years, founder of Frost Lines, Inc. He had once been strong, overbearing, outspoken, but this sick old man was just a shadow, almost a caricature, of that dynamic individual. I remembered, as I took the indicated chair near the head of his bed, that he had

been stricken with some kind of spinal disease about two years before, leaving him mostly bedridden.

He had a very simple reason for wanting the services of a private detective, he said. You could hear in his voice the echoes of the power that had once been his to wield. He went on to say that I had been the operative chosen by Bathsgate, his lawyer, on the basis of my record of integrity and discretion, and because I was fully bonded; men who operated large businesses, who were constantly in the public eye, could ill afford publicity of any kind. Did I understand?

I said that I did.

From the night table at his elbow, he took a small sheet of flimsy paper which I recognized as an overseas cable. He had, Frost said, received this from his son, Dale, one hour before I had been summoned. He handed me the wire with thin, gnarled fingers and told me to read it. It said:

DAD NEED TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS CASH URGENT. URGENT. NO TIME TO WAIT FOR BANK TRANSFER CAN SOMEBODY BRING SOONEST PLANE. WILL EXPLAIN LATER.

DALE.

Frost was talking again almost before I had finished

reading the cable. He explained that Dale, who was twenty-two, had graduated that June from one of the more exclusive Eastern colleges; but before accepting a rather important junior executive's position with Frost Lines, Inc., he had professed a desire to spend a year in Europe—a sort of youthful last fling before settling down to the sobriety of the business world. Frost had concurred, remembering his own youth, and Dale had left alone in mid-June.

He had entered Spain toward the end of July, after a period in France and Italy. Majorca was an attractive lure, and it seemed that young Dale had become entranced with the island.

And Dale had written to his father that he would be staying on there for an indefinite period, that he had rented a small villa in Palma Nova, one of the sun-and-fun areas on the southern coast.

Since that time he had written faithfully, once a week, if only a line or two on a post card. The last letter had arrived three days ago. In it, there had been no indication that the boy was in any financial difficulties. His regular monthly check, which I judged to be substantial, even though Frost did not mention the sum, had

appeared to take care of Dale's needs more than adequately.

I was to find out, directly or indirectly, why the boy so urgently needed ten thousand dollars that he could not wait four or five days for a bank transfer, and then notify his father immediately. I was to deliver that sum of money, just as Dale had requested, because no matter the reason for the demand, the mere fact that his son needed it was enough for Millard Frost. For these two things, Frost would buy my round-trip plane tickets, incur any necessary expenses, and pay me five hundred dollars besides.

I took the job without having to think about it at all.

Frost had already authorized the ten thousand to be delivered to him by one of his banks, and a messenger showed up with it a few minutes later. The old man put the money into one of these chain-lock briefcases, and then gave me an expense check for two hundred dollars and the address of Dale's villa on Majorca. He got on the bedside telephone and ordered somebody to make the ticket bookings with the airlines, and to send a wire to Dale letting him know I was coming.

We shook hands after he hung up, and I left him there in the darkened bedroom, hiding

his thoughts and his emotions behind his mask of suffering...

SPANISH CUSTOMS was a simple enough procedure, and I was finished with it in less than half an hour. At the exchange booth, I traded a fifty dollar bill for close to thirty-five hundred pesetas in Spanish currency; then I picked up my single bag—I had kept the briefcase with me the whole time, of course—and walked out to where a line of taxis waited along the front.

It was very hot for October and I rode in the back seat of the taxi with the windows down, taking in the sights like any other tourist. Palma Nova was some twenty-five kilometers from the airport. Traffic was heavy, but the Spaniards drove with that same careless disregard for life and limb you found in Mexico City or possibly in Manhattan. We made it out there in about twenty minutes.

It was a typical tourist village: streets and galleries lined with expensive souvenir and curio shops, a couple of discotheques, a profusion of sidewalk bars and cafés, and a dozen or so hotels similar to the ones in Palma. On the left was the *playa*, a long narrow beach that was jammed with near-naked humanity ranging in skin

tones from pure white to an almost gold-black.

Near the cut-out circle that appeared to serve as the village center, we turned off to the right and climbed up into the low hills which overlooked the sea. The driver made a couple of turns, and then swung into a short, graveled dead-end street. At its end, an old-style Spanish villa, covered with purple bougainvillea, sat partially hidden by a high stone wall.

There was a portico off on one side, and a silver MG roadster waited on the drive, facing toward the street. Millard Frost had told me that Dale had bought the car in France.

I paid the taxi driver a couple of hundred pesetas and went up onto the villa's porch and rang the bell. The door opened almost immediately, and I was looking at a tall, thin boy wearing a mod-design shirt and a pair of flared slacks with a wide, ornate leather belt. His black hair was very long, very unkempt, and he had bushy sideburns that reached almost to his chin on either side of his deeply tanned cheeks.

He said, "You're from my father?" in a voice that confirmed the nervous flicker in his bright green eyes.

I said that I was, and introduced myself. He took my hand, released it almost instant-



ly, and then stepped back a little. "Did you bring the money?"

"I brought it," I told him. I lifted the briefcase in my left hand, and his eyes flicked over it, flicked away.

"Well," he said, "do you want to come in?"

"That might be nice."

"I've got a lot of things to do, so you won't be able to stay very long. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped."

"Sure," I said.

Inside it was dark and considerably cooler. The furnishings were sparse, but what there was, was ornately carved; a long Spanish refectory table took up most of one half of the

room lengthwise. Through an archway I could see a terrace, and beyond it the sparkling blue of the Mediterranean in the distance.

I said, "You wouldn't happen to have a beer, would you Dale? I could really use one after that taxi ride."

"I'm sorry, no."

"Well, I'll take anything you've got that's tall and cold."

"I don't have a thing, I'm sorry." He wiped the palm of his hands on his slacks. "Look, I don't mean to be rude or anything, but I really have got a lot of things to do. Couldn't you just give me the money now? You can get a beer or something in one of the caf]es down on the strip."

I studied him for a long moment, watching his eyes; he kept avoiding my gaze. *He's not only nervous, I thought, he's scared. I wonder what he could have gotten himself involved in?*

"Your father's worried about you, Dale," I said. "He thinks you might be in some kind of trouble."

"I'm not in any trouble."

"Why do you need ten thousand dollars so badly?"

"That's none of your business."

"No," I said, "but it's your father's business."

"I'll discuss it with him, then."

"I think he'd like you to discuss it with me."

"Is that what he said?"

"He wants to be sure everything is all right."

"I told you, everything is fine."

"Then you shouldn't mind telling me why you need the money."

"Damn it, I don't have to tell you anything!" His jaw was quivering with emotion now. "Are you going to give me my money?"

I said quietly, stretching the truth a little, "My instructions from your father were to find out why you need it first."

"I don't believe that," he said angrily. "I know my father better than that. Now you'd better give me my money."

"Look, son—" I began, and he took one short, quick step forward and hit me high on the left cheekbone with a clumsy, sweeping right. He plucked at the briefcase with his other hand, pulled it out of my fingers as I staggered backward. The backs of my calves hit the low, hammered copper top of a coffee table and I went over it and down. My head cracked against the linoleum flooring, and pain burst in tongues of light behind my eyes.

I rolled over and pushed up onto my hands and knees, shaking my head. Dimly, I

heard the sound of the front door slamming.

I got on my feet, a little unsteadily, and put a hand up to my cheek. It came away wet with blood. I stumbled to the front door and threw it open, and in that moment the silver roadster came hurtling out of the drive with the engine roaring and the tires screaming on the paving. Bits of gravel, like flying shrapnel, spun out on both sides of the rear tires as he shot down the short street and swung left at the corner.

I stood there for a time, holding onto the door and listening to the sound of the little car fading in the distance. Then I went back inside and found the bathroom and inspected my cheek in the mirror. There was an inch-long gash there, and it was trickling ribbons of blood.

I found some antiseptic and a gauze bandage in the medicine cabinet and fixed the cut up so that the bleeding stopped. Then I went out and sat down on one of the chairs at the refectory table. My head was throbbing, and the spot where it had struck the floor was soft to the touch.

Now what? I thought. Hell, it was the kid's money, after all. But that didn't excuse the cut on my cheek, or the way he had acted; and the fact remained

that Millard Frost had hired me not only to deliver the money, but to learn why his son needed it. It seemed pretty obvious now that young Dale was in deep trouble of some kind, and it was up to me to find out what it was.

I had the thought, then, that there could be something in the villa to give me an idea what the boy's problem was, or where he might have gone. I decided I might as well have a look around.

The villa had four rooms, two bedrooms and a front room and a kitchen. In an old roll-top desk in corner of the front room, I found some notepaper and a few envelopes and a monthly statement from a Palma Nova café called Señor Pepe's. It was for a substantial sum by Spanish standards, and I gathered from the itemization that Dale spent a good deal of his time there.

There was nothing at all in one of the bedrooms; in the other, on the nightstand by the big double bed, was a small color photograph in a cardboard frame. It was of a girl, very young, very blonde, with skin the color of rich bronzer-work. I thought she was probably Swedish or Norwegian. Across the left lower corner was written in a neat, feminine hand: *For my Dale*

from his *Brita*. I slipped the photo out of its frame and put it into the pocket of my coat.

I returned to the front room then, and stood looking at my bag. My head throbbed dully. Well, all right. I didn't have much, but I had started with less before. I picked up my bag, went out into the thick heat that was Majorca at midday, and started to earn my fee.

SEÑOR PEPE'S was an old-style Spanish building with a rust-colored tile-roof and white-washed stucco walls and a lot of vinedraped arches. I threaded my way through a maze of bamboo tables filled with noisy tourists drinking gin-tonics and Cuba libres, and went inside.

Behind a right-angle bar a short, sandy-haired guy in his late twenties was filling a cooler with bottles of San Miguel. He had a neatly clipped, sandy goatee, and an air of sober industriousness about him. I went up to the bar and put my bag down and sat on one of the stools. He looked up inquiringly, and I said, "I'll take one of those cold, if you've got it."

"Aye, that I do," the sandy guy said. He was British, or maybe Scotch; I couldn't tell which. He pulled another of the bottles from beneath the ice and popped the cap and poured a glass for me.

I drank most of it off, took a breath, and finished the icy brew. It had been a long walk from the villa, and my throat was parched; and my head felt as if it would burst, like a balloon pumped too full of air.

I said to the sandy guy, "Are you on here regularly?"

"Aye," he said. "I'm the owner."

"Then you probably know a boy named Dale Frost. An American, renting a villa up on *Calle Lluch*."

"Sure, I know Dale. He used to come in most every evening. One of my best customers, he was."

"Used to?"

"Well, I haven't seen much of him lately."

"Why is that?"

He shrugged. "I couldn't tell you. They come and they go."

"How long did Dale stop being one of your regulars?"

"About three weeks back." He gave me a quizzical look. "Why would you be asking?"

"I represent his father, back in San Francisco," I said. "There's been a small misunderstanding, or maybe I should say a lack of communication."

"Oh, I see."

He didn't see at all, but I was not going to enlighten him. I said, "Would you have any idea where he's been keeping himself these past few weeks?"

"I'm sorry, I don't."

"Do you know any of his friends?"

"Dale has a lot of friends in Palma Nova, mister," the sandy guy said. "Popular sort, good-looking, plenty of money."

"Anyone in particular?"

"I can't think of any just now."

"Girls?"

He smiled. "How high can you count?"

I got the snapshot of the young, tanned blonde girl out of my pocket and let him see it. "What about her?"

"Aye," he said. "That's Brita. Quite a bird, that one. Dale brought her here a couple of times."

"Do you know where I can find her?"

"She works in a Swedish bar in Magalluf. Name of it is The Little John."

"Would she be there now?"

"I couldn't tell you."

"Okay. How do I find this place?"

"It's on the main street. You can't miss it."

I paid him and thanked him for his time and went out into the sun again. I had noticed a line of taxis in the village center, and I walked back there and hired one. We rode out to Magalluf, about a mile distant, and he let me off before a small restaurant-bar set into a line of



shops on an esplanade well back from the street.

A young, dark-haired guy with a thick mustache that right-angled down on either side of his mouth, forming three sides of a frame for thin lips, was behind the bar inside. I asked him if Brita was there.

He said, "Yes," in Swedish-accented English.

"Do you suppose I could see her?"

He shrugged. "I guess so."

"Thanks."

He shrugged again, and disappeared through a door behind him.

I went over and sat down in one of the booths against the right-hand wall. My head still ached. I lit a cigarette and

rubbed sweat from my forehead with a napkin and wished it wasn't so damned hot; I was not used to this kind of heat in October.

After a couple of minutes, the door behind the bar opened and the dark-haired guy came out and held it for the girl just behind him. She was taller than I expected from the photograph, a little fuller in the hips; she wore one of those micro-mini skirts and a frilly blouse and huge, gold-loop Gypsy earrings.

I tried not to stare at her legs as she came from behind the bar and slipped into the booth opposite; but they were very good legs, and a man never stops looking.

"I am Brita," she said in excellent English, and brushed a heat-dampened wisp of blonde hair away from her eyes. "Lars said you wished to talk to me."

"Yes," I said. "About Dale Frost."

Her smile grew faintly sad. "Dale?"

"Yes. Do you mind?"

"No, I guess I don't."

I told her my name, and that I represented Dale's father. I said then, "I understand you know Dale pretty well, Brita."

"Well," she answered, "I was going to bed with him."

It was a simple, uninflected statement of fact, no bitterness

or defiance or regret or false shame, and suddenly I felt very old sitting there, very old and very out of touch with the directions of modern society. I thought about generation gaps and wondered briefly what kind of father I would have made if I had gotten married, and that made me even more uncomfortable.

I lit another cigarette to have something to do with my hands. "You're not... seeing Dale any more?" I asked.

"No."

"How long has it been since you've talked to him?"

"About two weeks, I think."

"Why did the two of you break up?"

"It was because of this boy he became friends with."

"What boy is that?"

"An American boy like Dale," Brita said. "His name is Peter York. I didn't like him at all. And I didn't like his girl friend, either, always talking silly. She and that Peter make a fine couple, I think, with their funny eyes like jungle cats. I hate green eyes; they make me cold."

"Did you and Dale have an argument over this Peter York?"

She nodded emphatically. "I told him if he kept Peter as a friend, I didn't want him to be my boy any more. I told him he

was going to get in a lot of trouble because of Peter, but he just got mad and went away and didn't come back to me."

"What kind of trouble did you mean, Brita?"

She studied me for a long moment. "I guess I'd better tell you," she said. "I should have told somebody before this, but I didn't know who. I don't want to see Dale be hurt; he's a nice boy, except for that Peter."

I said, "What about Peter?"

"I think he takes drugs," Brita said.

In spite of the heat in there, a small cold thing settled between my shoulder blades. "You think so, but you're not sure?"

"No. I heard some things."

"What sort of things?"

"About drug parties."

"Do you know what kind of drugs?"

"Marijuana, and maybe LSD."

"Did Dale ever take drugs, Brita?"

"Oh no. He isn't that kind of boy. Or he wasn't until he met that Peter."

"And you're afraid Peter talked him into trying them."

"Yes. I tried to tell Dale about Peter, about what I heard with the drugs, but he just wouldn't listen to me."

Yeah, I thought. Well,

maybe he started listening later on—to the wrong kind of advice. Because you can buy a hell of a lot of pot or speed or LSD with ten thousand dollars. I felt a little sick to my stomach, thinking about it.

"Where does this Peter live, Brita?" I asked her.

"On the other side of the island," she answered. "In a chalet near Cala Ratjada."

"How do I get there?"

She told me; and then she said, "Dale is a nice boy, really he is. I hope you can make him understand about Peter, and about those drugs."

"So do I, honey," I said softly. "So do I."

THE HARBOR at Cala Ratjada was studded with better than a hundred small fishing smacks and "trollers, bobbing at anchor on the gentle blue water. They supplied most of the island's fresh seafood—prawns and squid and *raya* and denton, a dozen other varieties. That information had been provided, along with a small Spanish Seat sedan and a detail map of Majorca, by the rental agency I had located in Palma Nova.

The drive from Palma had taken an hour and a half, the road was pretty good, but only two lanes, and there had been a lot of traffic. I had circled

through the fishing village-cum-resort center a few minutes earlier, following the road along the rim of rocky cliffs and promontories on the northern side of the harbor. It was late afternoon now, and I could see the setting sun laying a path of golden fire across the open sea as I swung out toward the Pta. des Farayos.

There wasn't much out there. The road was unpaved, little more than a lane, and barren rock and dry grass and a few stunted cypress trees dominated the terrain. Brita had said that York's *chalet* was the middle one of three balanced on the cliffs there.

When the first rust-colored tile roof came into sight, I pulled the Seat off onto the hard ground at the side of the road and stepped out. A gentle sea wind had gotten up now, and the smell of salt and cold, clean water was in the air. It was not nearly as hot as it had been in Palma Nova.

I started up the trail until I reached a point where I could see the three *chalets*—built of rough stone blocks, with glass-bead curtains serving as doors and the ever-present louvered shutters over the facing windows. I stood in the shade of one of the cypress trees and looked at the middle structure. It seemed deserted.

There was no sign of a car, of people; nothing stirred at the other two cottages.

I waited there for a couple of minutes, and then I lit a cigarette and started across to the center *chalet*. I stopped in front of the curtained doorway and listened to the wind humming in from the sea. I called out, "Hello inside!"

The beads made a faint tinkling sound in the breeze, but there was no other response. I wondered if I ought to go in; and then I said the hell with it and pushed the vertical strings of beads apart and stepped inside.

It was dim in there with the shutters closed. There were a table and a couple of chairs and a blackened hearth with a lot of bottles and Majorcan pottery on the shelving which served as a mantelpiece. Through an archway on my right was a bedroom with a couple of rumpled cots. Directly ahead were two more archways, with what looked like a small kitchen set between them, and beyond the second one I could see a balcony jutting out over the precipice.

I moved slowly across the main room and stepped out onto the balcony. The golden fire of the setting sun was almost blinding in its reflection off the Mediterranean, and I

raised one hand to shade my eyes. A rusted, iron railing fenced the balcony on its three exposed sides, and there was nothing at all on the stone balcony.

I turned and went back inside and entered the bedroom. A quick search there netted me nothing much; but while I was conducting it, something jarred my memory, something Brita had said to me in *The Little John*. A coldness washed over me again, and I was standing there, thinking hard on the thing I had recalled, when the glass-beaded curtain clicked suddenly in the main room.

I went out there, and he was standing just inside, looking over at me. On his right and a little behind him stood a girl with braided, seal-brown hair. I hadn't heard the roadster drive up, and I thought that they must have parked it back where I had left the rented Seat—maybe because they had been alerted by the presence of the strange car.

He wore the mod design shirt and flared slacks and ornate belt he had had on earlier in the day, and his long black hair was wind-tangled. In his right hand was the briefcase with Millard Frost's ten thousand dollars. His gaze was steady and dispassionate.



"Hello, Peter," I said.

He didn't move, and it was very quiet in there. The girl clung to Peter York's arm, looking frightened; she wore buckskins and sandals and an Indian headband.

York said finally, "So you know."

"Yeah," I said. "I know."

"How?"

"Something a girl told me today," I said. "About Peter York, and green eyes, and how she hated green eyes because they made her cold. You've got green eyes, sonny; but I'd be willing to bet an arm Dale Frost doesn't."

York did not say anything.

His hand tightened around the handle of the briefcase, and he moved his feet apart a little.

I said, "That was a pretty stupid thing you did this morning, hitting me and grabbing the money. All you would have had to do was take it easy and fabricate some kind of explanation for needing it. I would have been satisfied, more than likely, and given it to you immediately and been on my way. The whole thing would have worked fine for you."

He watched me, sullen, silent.

I went on, "It was a dandy little scheme, all right. You sent that wire to Dale's father, and sat back and waited for somebody like me to bring you the money. You must have wheedled or forced the information from Dale that his father would answer any summons for help without question; but you couldn't take the chance of getting the money out of a local bank if it was drafted over here. Dale was probably well-known at whatever Spanish bank he used, with his father sending an allowance every month. There was a chance sending the wire, too, that whoever made the special delivery would know Dale on sight—which probably explains why you were so nervous this morning at Dale's villa; but it

was a much lesser risk, and for ten thousand dollars it was worth it, right?"

The girl took a step forward. "Listen," she began, "listen—"

"Shut up, Nina," York said to her.

I looked at the two of them. "Where's Dale Frost?"

"How should we know, man?"

"Where is he, York?"

"Up yours, pops."

"You little bastard, where's Dale Frost!"

"I took a step forward, trembling with sudden and consuming anger. York dropped the briefcase and shoved the girl away in the same motion, and his right hand dropped to the pocket of his trousers. I knew what he was going for, or sensed it, but he was very quick and I had only time for another step before he came up with the knife. He held it straight out in front of him, a long and very thin switch knife that gleamed as if with some inner light of its own in the shadowed room.

I stopped moving and stood still, with my arms out from my body. "What do you think that's going to get you, sonny?"

"Freedom, baby, that's what. Nina and me, we need that ten thousand to get back to the States. We're flat out here, and we need the poke bad, man."

"Bad enough to kill for it?"

"Yeah, that bad."

"How about Dale Frost? Did you put that knife in him after he gave you the information you needed for your extortion attempt?"

York said nothing. But the girl, Nina, huddled against the wall and sobbing, pushed broken words into the silence. "Dale's not dead, we didn't kill anybody! Oh God, all we wanted was the money!"

"Where is he, then?"

"Next door, the *chalet* next door is vacant and we put him in there and worked on him with amphetamines until he told us what we wanted to know. But we weren't going to kill him. Peter said we weren't going to kill him. All we wanted was the money so we could get back to the States—"

"Yeah," I said.

"Peter?" she said to York. "Peter, please, I don't want anything to do with murder! Don't kill him, please, Peter, please!"

"You'd better listen to her, York. Put the knife up."

"Suppose you take it away from me, man," York said. His attention was full on me, and his face was white and tense and his eyes had death in them now. The girl was still sobbing, still pleading, but for him she was not even there.

He began to move toward me, and he held the knife extended out from his body, palm turned up, moving the blade in slow, teasing circles. I did not look at his face; you can't defend yourself against a knife looking at anything *but* the knife. The muscles in my stomach were contracted, and I could feel fear like hot, melting wax flowing through me; a knife is the most terrifying of weapons.

But I had anger too, black, burning anger, and I stood my ground and let him come. I wanted him to think I was paralyzed by the sight of the knife. His fingers were loose on the handle, and I watched them, waiting, because when he made his move the fingers would tighten reflexively a fraction of a second early and in that way I would know and have time to counter-attack.

Maybe.

The sound of our breathing was harsh and unnaturally sibilant in the small room, and sweat rolled thickly along my body. I could feel a tic trying to start up below my left eye. But I could not blink; just that much time would give him all the edge he needed.

The fingers tightened; he made a noise in his throat and lunged forward with the knife.

I spun to one side, sucking in

my belly, arching my back outward, and the underhand slash cut through the thin material in my jacket, hanging up there. I got his wrist in my left hand and his elbow in my right and brought my knee up and his arm down at the same time. There was a soft cracking sound, and York screamed.

I released him then and he fell onto the floor, holding his arm. The knife slid free of my jacket and fell clattering beside him. I picked it up immediately and closed it and put it away in my own pocket.

Then I began to tremble, a delayed reaction from the strain and tension and dark anger. I took several deep breaths, calming myself again. York lay at my feet, moaning softly, with no fight left in him. The girl was still sobbing at the wall by the door.

I picked up the briefcase and went out through the glass-beaded curtains, into the coolness of approaching dusk. Dale Frost was where the girl had said he would be, unconscious but breathing strongly. It took me a couple of minutes to cut away the ropes with which they had bound him, and then I carried his lean and limp form out and down to the rented sedan.

After I had laid him carefully on the rear seat, I

went to where Dale's MG had been parked nearby. I opened up the engine compartment and jerked off the rotor and put it in my pocket. I wanted nothing more to do with York and Nina, and they could not get far on foot before I reported to the Spanish authorities. Then I returned to the Seat and got it started and went away from there.

STANDING on the veranda of my hotel room later that evening, I smoked and looked out at the brightly lighted Paseo Maritimo and the harbor of Palma beyond. Far out, near the breakwater, there were several two-man night fishing boats in search of anchovies. Each of them had a single yellow lantern attached to a center mast, and from this distance they looked like sluggish fireflies on the black, still water.

It was some nice view, and some nice night, and I was enjoying both thoroughly. Three hours had passed since I had left the Pta. des Farayos with Dale Frost. In Cala Ratjada, I had found a guy who spoke English and he had gone with me to La Guardia Civil headquarters to report what had happened. I was told that an arrest would be made promptly on Peter York and his

girl friend. There was no hospital facility in Cala Ratjada; but one of the Civil officers provided me with a motorcycle escort into Palma, where I turned Dale over to the capable Spanish medical corps.

He was going to be fine. The doctors had examined him fully and had pronounced that he would be back on his feet again in a few days. As soon as he was conscious, and I had had the chance to talk briefly with him, I had put in a trans-Atlantic telephone call to Millard Frost in San Francisco.

I told Frost the story in detail, with a warm feeling down inside because a sick old man could keep right on having his son to live and hope for, and because a nice young kid had learned a valuable lesson about a lot of things.

That warm feeling would have been enough reward for me, but Millard Frost did not think so. He thought a thousand-dollar bonus and a full week's paid vacation at this

particular luxury hotel would do instead. I did not argue with him.

So here I was. I had eaten dinner in the lavish dining room; then I had come up here to my room to relax, and to put in a phone call to The Little John in Magalluf, to tell a certain young lady named Brita that a certain young man named Dale would be most happy to see her while he was recuperating in the hospital.

Now, as I stood on the veranda, I could hear the sultry beat of Spanish music drifting up from the hotel garden directly below. It got into your blood, that music. I wondered if I ought to go down there and join the festivities, and then decided—why not?

I could have a drink or two, and watch the dancers; and maybe, just maybe, I could find a lonely lady to talk to in the bargain. Even for an old guy like me, there might still be a little magic in a warm Mediterranean night.

In the Next Issue—

STAB AND RUN

by MAX VAN DERVEER

Money, men, the heady feeling of female power—the arrogant, slim blonde temptress had it made in every way but one. She had learned how to live. Soon—too soon—she was to learn how to die. Don't fail to read this engrossing tale of a go-girl's last day to live.

*She was sleek, demanding, that proud mistress of his.
Today he must prove he was worthy of her...*

MEDEA

by WILLIAM T. SILENT

THE MAN AT the car agency said, "Mister, like the song says, there ain't a thing out there you can't get in here. That Corvette you're looking at is as good as you'll find anywhere. Why go to the factory? I admit I'm biased, seeing there's a commission involved, but—"

Jason said, "You'll get your commission. Have the factory send my car directly to you. But remember—I don't want it driven, used by anyone. Understand? I want to be first, the only one. Got it?"

The salesman said, "Got it," a shade too loudly.

After Jason left, the salesman lit a cigarette and scratched his head. "Some guys feel like that about a girl," he said. "But a car—"

If there was anything extraordinary about Jason's life, it was not his job, his apartment, his appearance, or his general

mode of living, which were so nondescript as to be scarcely worth notice. Nonetheless, Jason did have certain peculiarities, the first of which was a distinct aversion to people in general and women in particular.

As a young man, Jason had once read a Sunday supplement article about black widow spiders. The entire description, especially of their mating habits, had produced a peculiarly vivid and lasting impression on him.

The female of the species, he had learned, after taking her pleasure of the male, then destroyed him. In the spider's grisly habits Jason found a perfect metaphor for the behavior of the female of the human species. As far as he was concerned, most women were no better than the black widow, an opinion which may explain



why Jason was still single at the age of thirty-eight.

Cars, on the other hand, were trustworthy. If you treated them properly, they treated you properly. An

automobile went where you wanted it to go, did what you wanted it to do, and never gave you a lot of back talk, either. "A car was," Jason once said, "a considerably better mistress

than most of what walked around in skirts."

And yet, when Jason could finally afford the car of his dreams, he named it by some perverse quirk, "The Black Widow." And if there was any other peculiarity in Jason's life, it was his involvement with his automobile.

It was a 1972 Corvette Convertible: long, low, sleek, powerful. Solid, rich curves swelling from the wasp-waisted body gave it an unmistakable look of hunger and speed. It possessed the stark directness of purpose of a hydroplane or a Hollywood sex queen, and in its own dark sort of way it might even have been called beautiful. Jason thought so, at least.

He had ordered it new from the factory in order to get exactly what he wanted. Then, too, he wanted one that no other driver had ever touched before. Buying a used car was like marrying a divorcee; Jason did not like the idea of getting one someone else had used and rejected.

The top-of-the-line engine was bolstered by the standard performance accessories, from a big four-barrel carburetor up front to the dual exhausts in the rear, and controlled by a four-speed gearbox. Even with the lowered compression and anti-pollution devices of the

newest models, there were few faster Corvettes on the road. Yet his automobile was more than a speed machine. It was plush, comfortable, and incredibly alluring. Invitingly raked bucket seats in black leather and thick, full carpeting in the same color matched the gleaming sable exterior. To the glittering array of dials, gauges, and switches were added virtually every available power and luxury option.

The only alteration Jason made on his car was to paint, in red-orange, on the side panel in front of each door, the words, *Black Widow*. Underneath this, and also on the top of the round knob of the gear shift, he added in the same color a figure shaped like an hourglass.

Jason cleaned the car daily, inside and out. He took a simple but intense pleasure in rubbing every inch of the fiberglass body with a wet sponge. It was almost like giving the car a bath, to see the sparkling finish reappear as the cool, clear water rinsed away whatever small amount of dirt had accumulated in twenty-four hours.

He lived alone in his bachelor apartment and did not have to share the Black Widow with anyone else, and he certainly would never have considered letting anyone bor-



row the car. Although his job did not require it, not a day passed that he and the Widow were not on the highway...

Jason slipped into the left bucket seat and fastened the seat belt tight around his waist, adjusting the shoulder harness and enjoying the feeling of closeness and security it gave him. He pulled the door closed, turned on the ignition, and then waited, letting the car warm up. His hands slid around the smooth roundness of the steering wheel.

After a few moments he backed carefully out of the driveway, stopped, and eased the gear lever into first. The engine seemed to Jason to be purring contentedly as he let out on the clutch and the Black Widow glided forward.

For a while Jason cruised up the curving coast highway,

captivated by the incredibly warm feeling of oneness that came from the car's instant response to his every touch. Jason never felt quite that way about anything else.

He had just come to a stop at a red light when a blue Mustang 2+2 squealed to a too-sudden halt next to him. The driver revved up the Mustang's engine, and the little car kept jerkily trying to move forward. Jason didn't need to look at the blue fender insignia to recognize the High-Performance 289 engine.

Surprise mixed with annoyance at the other driver's audacity. It was a good engine, and the fastback was indeed a quick machine, with the nimble look of the Mustang's early days, before it acquired its later bloated appearance. Nonetheless, the small Ford was no match for a 454 Corvette, and the other driver should have realized it. Jason hoped the Widow would not be too affronted. Still, the Mustang had to be put in its place.

The light turned green and the Mustang jumped across the intersection. Jason's hand slowly caressed the knob of the gear shift as the Black Widow waited expectantly. When the Mustang was perhaps four car-lengths ahead, Jason pressed down on the accelerator, and the Black

Widow came to life, squalling spitefully.

Wide oval tires shrieked on pavement as acceleration pressed Jason back down against the seat. The car picked up speed, and Jason pulled the shift towards him. The car jumped ahead again, pushing against him with renewed acceleration. The Mustang was abruptly caught, passed, and forgotten. The engine's revolutions increased.

Jason's heart beat faster. His left hand squeezed the wheel tighter. His right hand moved more and more quickly, thrusting the Hurst shifter into third gear and then slamming it back into fourth with almost savage pleasure.

The feeling of power and speed was a fantastic, unimaginable delight. Faster and faster they went. The wind tore at his hair. His head throbbed. His heart pounded wildly. Grass, trees, the road: all became a blur. Jason was oblivious of everything outside the car. He was conscious only of the surging of the car beneath and around him. The tachometer went higher as the revolutions went up and up. Faster and faster...

The engine whined ecstatically.

The next morning, after a night of nightmarish dreams

which eluded his waking memory, Jason discovered that the Black Widow was gone. For a few dazed seconds he checked the other parking slots, struck by the futile notion that he must have parked the car in another spot by mistake or possibly misremembered his allotted space. These were, of course, but temporary barriers against the obvious, and at length he sank down on the low stone retaining wall bordering the sidewalk, overcome with the unwanted flood of comprehension.

The apartment in which he lived, like so many in California, did not boast locking garages, and the Widow had been parked in an open carport, offering easy access for the thief. In addition, since the weather had been warm recently, Jason had left the top down, so whoever had stolen the car had not even had to jimmy the door open.

After a time, Jason regained his feet and turned his eyes east. In these circumstances he was quite helpless on his own, and the police station only six blocks away gave him a target for his emotions and a catalyst for his energy.

At this point, as is so often the case, the arm of the law was helped by the hand of fate. The young man who had stolen the

car was motivated by no more than a desire to partake of the same thrills Jason himself enjoyed. In the course of a drag race with a G.T.O. down Beach Boulevard, the Widow's driver lost control of the car at a crucial moment, and the Corvette glanced off the side of a parked car before spinning to a rest in the middle of the street. The parked car in question happened to be owned and occupied by an off-duty highway patrolman.

Thief and car awaited Jason together at the police station.

Afterward, he had only a dreamlike recollection of the soft-spoken desk sergeant, the handful of forms he'd filled out. Jason did not consider himself an emotional man, but he had been ripped by strange and powerful emotions. The screams and threats that echoed in his brain he remembered as if someone else had uttered them. And there had been hands, restraining hands, holding him back...

Memory blurred, receded, at sight of the large dent in the right front fender, like a naked wound on the Widow's shoulder. He stood there by the car for long minutes, helplessly rubbing his hand over the mangled surface, the texture feeling strange and horrible to his touch.

When he could stand it no more, he got in and inspected the interior. Except for a crack in the right window, there seemed to be nothing to indicate that someone else had been inside her. Only a small deposit of dirt left on the floor, like— Jason's mind shied away from the comparison before it could be grasped. He opened the door and tried to brush the dirt out with his hands, but he could not dispel the shadow of another man's presence.

He turned on the ignition and listened anxiously. While he brooded, the engine coughed unhappily.

The unique rapport he had had with the Black Widow was gone, and it was all the fault of a stranger. Another man touching her, handling her, forcing her, despoiling what should have been Jason's alone. Knowing someone else had been in his place made the seat feel different, as if the impression of that other body remained, subtly altering the contours of the seat so that it no longer fit quite so snugly around him. There was a different smell to the leather, a different touch to the steering wheel and gear shift.

The longer Jason sat there staring, his hand unconsciously sliding back and forth over the Hurst shifter, the more intense

his own pain and anger became. The guilty man, he was sure, would be freed almost immediately, on bail-bond if nothing else. Free to steal and drive again, free to remember what he had done with the Black Widow, free to think of Jason and laugh.

When the man finally appeared on the front steps of the station, Jason knew what he had to do. No one could take the Black Widow like that. No one could know the same incredible pleasure with her that Jason knew. No one.

Jason pulled at his seat-belt, but it was twisted, and the buckle resisted his hurried attempts to fasten it. Snarling, he forced the car into gear and accelerated out of the parking lot. As he turned the corner, he saw his quarry again.

The thief stepped out into the street with the invulnerable confidence of the California pedestrian, causing drivers coming from the other direction to jerk to a halt in front of him. He did not even deign to glance in Jason's direction until the Corvette was a hundred feet away. Perhaps it was the vindictive moaning of the engine that made him look up.

Both lanes on Jason's side of the boulevard were empty, and the thief had nowhere to go. For an instant he froze, as if he

were gripped in the same paralysis that welded Jason's hands to the steering wheel and held his stiffened foot to the floor. Then the man tried to jump aside, as the car seemed to leap at him.

Jason hardly felt the concussion as the man's body was struck and hurled aside. His hand moved automatically on the gear shift, as the Corvette sped past the last fringe of housing and out of town, but instead of the familiar thrilling pleasure he felt a helpless terror. The faint sound of sirens came to his ear.

The Corvette was doing more than seventy miles an hour when it hit a chuckhole. Damaged by the previous accident, a front tire blew out.

The Corvette lurched and twisted beneath him, fighting the restraining grip of his hands. He tried to calm and slow the frenzied thrashing, but the Widow's frantic movements were beyond his control, and he was drawn forward inexorably. The car hit the raised tracks of the railroad crossing broadside, rolled over once, and then slowly righted itself. Unrestrained by seat belt and unprotected by roof, what remained of Jason's chewed-up body was left on the tracks. The Black Widow's engine gave a sated belch and was silent.

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A New SAM CULP Exciting Novelet

THE CINDER MAN

The charred, dead horror that had been Edwin Klamath stared sightlessly up into the darkness. Who had lured him to his last fatal tryst? Only he—and a ghoulish killer—knew...

by JEFFREY M. WALLMANN

THE CHEVVY panel lay on its side, fire-gutted and water-soaked. All four of its tires were blown, the glass was shattered and smoked, its hood was sprung back into the cab, and its frame was bent around the immoveable boulder that had stopped its fall.

Sammy Culp studied the nine by five glossy photo of the burnt-out truck a moment longer, then reached for another picture from the pile on Sorensen's desk in front of him.

The second snap was of the wreck's interior. Even though Culp had been in insurance work for fifteen years, it made his skin creep to look at it. Against the left-hand door, and partially coiled beneath the

steering column, was the charred remains of something vaguely human.

"That's Edwin Klamath?" Culp asked, glancing up at Sorensen.

"When you get them that bad, it's hard to tell. But Klamath is missing, that's his truck, and his wife identified the few things that weren't burned up."

Lieutenant Sorensen had on a butternut-colored whipcord uniform. He was a thin man, leaner than Culp and almost as tall, but where Culp had greying hair, Sorensen had none. Instead, he had a fringe running around the back of his head, almost connecting with the broad, flat moustache in front.



It gave him the appearance of wearing a shaggy brown collar around the hemisphere of his skull.

"Positive identification will have to wait," he went on. "Klamath's dentist is out of

town for the week-end, but we'll get the teeth charts on Monday. I think it'll only be a formality, though."

"I see."

Culp picked up a third photo, this one taken from the

isolated road above the wreck. He could see portions of police cruisers, firetrucks, and a large wrecker parked along the wide, soft shoulder. A trail of plowed gravel, broken shrubs, and scraped oak showed where the truck had rolled a hundred-some yards down the grass and brush around the miniature truck. Tiny wisps of steam were rising from the blackened metal surface. By the way the wreck was curled around the boulder, it reminded Culp of a giant sowbug being baked in the setting sun.

"That's how we found him," Sorenson said. "Of course, the pumper got there first and put out the fire, but we didn't move anything until after the lab took the pics. No, it's Klamath, all right. Between his wife and Constantine— You knew that Klamath was an artist, didn't you?"

"Yes. It was down as his occupation on the policies."

"Well, Joel Constantine owns the local gallery which sold Klamath's works. Constantine says that Klamath left his gallery at a little before closing Friday night, about five-fifteen. Klamath would've taken the Hurwitz Canyon Boulevard to get to his home, and the fire was reported to the station at six-twelve. That part fits fine."

"But you still don't like it?"

"One hell of a funny accident, like I said to you on the phone." Sorenson shifted in his swivel chair, leaned forward for the stack of pictures. He shuffled through them and selected two, handing them to Culp. "Here. That top one is of the road where it goes around the curve Klamath missed."

Culp examined the picture, then smiled thinly. "Tire tracks on the shoulder, but no skid marks. Looks like he went over nice and easy, without a whimper."

"Exactly. The coroner found a deep bruise on his head, too. Impossible to say if he got it on the way down, or—"

Sorenson let the sentence trail off into a shrug. "The other picture's of the truck's gas tank. Lab says there's no sign of rupturing, only of exploding. Fumes trapped inside a tank already on fire cause that, not raw gas that's been thrown out of a split one, which would mean the tank was pretty low on fuel when the truck went over, and still intact when it hit."

"What about other inflammables inside, like thinner or turp?" Culp asked.

"Plenty. That truck of his was a floating art studio, and everything was tossed around badly, even change and things

out of his own pockets. But near as we can figure, what really started that blaze going were four two-gallon cans of gasoline."

"Four cans? Klamath was low on gas and he had eight gallons of it stored in the panel's back? Why?"

Sorenson looked at Culp with sober eyes. "We don't know."

The phone next to his elbow rang; Sorenson picked it up and listened for a moment, then said, "Yes, let her come in." When he replaced the receiver, he told Culp, "Mrs. Sharon Klamath is here." He raised his eyebrows slightly. "Quite a woman."

The frosted-glass door opened and a woman somewhere between thirty and thirty-five came into the small office. She was petite, with wide chestnut eyes, light brown hair, and an angular, almost hard face. At the moment, she was wearing an all-black knitted dress and an expression of tearful but righteous indignation.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Lieutenant," she said, "but may I claim my husband and his things now?"

Sorenson folded his hands together on the desk and looked up at her with guileless eyes. "Meet Sam Culp, Mrs.

Klamath. He's from Trans-National Adjustment Bureau; flew in from Hartford just this afternoon."

"How nice," she said perfunctorily. "Please, Lieutenant?"

"Mr. Culp is representing your insurance company."

Sharon Klamath turned toward Culp, a slightly puzzled frown creasing her forehead. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"TransNational handles field claims for many assurance companies, including Halcyon Mutual," Culp explained. "Soon as the local Halcyon agent learned of your husband's death, he notified the main office, which in turn notified us. With a thirty thousand—"

"I know, I know!" She pressed fingers to her temples, shaking herself as though suffering a bad headache. "Eddie bought it years ago, when we had money. I don't care. I simply don't care to talk about it now, though. Later, after I've buried him, but now—. The thought of Eddie lying down there in that cold, cold drawer..."

Sorenson cleared his throat. "Mrs. Klamath, an investig—"

"What for? It was an accident, a terrible accident."

"Nevertheless, there's still a routine to follow."

"Weren't you satisfied yesterday? All those questions, harassing me, hounding me. You like seeing women cry, Lieutenant?" Her voice was rising. "I was playing bridge with my friends and you know it!"

Sorenson began to look like the one who was harassed. He unfolded his hands and tapped his fingers in brooding silence, for a moment. Then he leaned down and opened the middle drawer, removing a bulky manila envelope with a list stapled to it.

Saying, "You identified these yesterday as belonging to your husband, Mrs. Klamath," he emptied the contents onto the desk. They consisted of blackened, warped metal: a gnarled hunk of metal which had once been a wide belt-buckle; an expensive, elliptical-shaped butane lighter, now burst, with the inscription *With Love, Sharon* barely legible across its molded top; what had once been wire frames to a pair of glasses; less than a dollar's worth of assorted coins; and three rings, two of which had no settings.

"Yes," Mrs. Klamath said softly. "They're Eddie's."

"Sign here." Sorenson turned the list around to face her and offered his pen. "You can take them with you. I'll have

your husband's body released from the morgue tomorrow. I can't now, because it's Sunday."

"Thank you, Lieutenant." She scooped everything back into the folder, then paused beside the door. "Mr. Culp—"

"After the funeral, Mrs. Klamath."

She nodded once, eyes lowered, and then she was gone.

"Double indemnity?" Sorenson asked when the door had shut.

"Yes. And the policy isn't voided in case of suicide, either."

"Too bad she was playing cards all Friday afternoon. A sixty grand pay-off for accidental death makes a dandy motive."

"Is that why you've held up releasing her husband's body?"

"Not really. I've nothing on her, and there sure wasn't anything in the way of evidence about him or his belongings. I was just hoping to stir up some excitement and see if anything would happen. Nothing has."

"Still don't like those four gas cans, do you?"

"Nor the lack of skid marks, nor the bump on his head."

"Uh-huh." Culp took out a short piece of straw from his shirt pocket and sucked on it, a substitute for the cigarette he craved. "She doesn't look to me

like the kind who'd rattle easy. More the Woman-Behind-Her-Man type."

"Right behind him, even before they were married, so I hear. Pushing him, shoving him up."

Sorenson sighed and tilted back in his chair. "Sorta wonder when Mrs. Klamath pushed her husband last."

CULP was a little surprised to find Joel Constantine's gallery open after he'd left Sorenson at the police station. Not only was *The Constantinople* open, but it was comfortably filled with people perusing the canvases and sculpture.

"Sundays are my busiest," Constantine explained after introductions. "Get them from as far away as Connecticut, even some from New York City, where the galleries close on the weekends. Brotherton's too small a suburb for me to lock out any customers."

"You handled all of Edwin Klamath's works?"

"He was under sole contract to me for the last year, yes." Constantine was a stocky man with a round, moonish face which smiled at most anything, in marked contrast to Culp's cragged, saturnine features. He paused in front of one painting and said: "Eric delivered this on



Friday, Mr. Culp. Do you like it?"

"Forest in the dead of winter, isn't it?"

"Supposed to be sailing ships at sea." Constantine grinned apologetically. "A failing of his, Mr. Culp. All well and good to do your own thing, as they say, but most buyers still prefer to know which end is up."

"I thought abstracts were quite popular."

"This isn't 57th Street, Mr. Culp, but New Jersey. While the level of culture isn't necessarily lower, it is decidedly different."

"Will his work increase in value now that he's dead?"

"Hard to tell, I hope so." He

smiled, showing sharp, porcelain teeth. "It's my business."

"Sure." Culp pursed his lips and turned away to look at the painting again.

"Halcyon Mutual," he said, "carries a five thousand sickness and accident policy on Klamath, and you're the beneficiary."

"That's right. I've been paying the premiums on it, too. It was taken out as a precaution for a loan I made him last year."

"Same time he went under sole contract to you?"

"Naturally. I needed some guarantee that I would get my money back, either by selling his works exclusively, or through benefits if something happened to him."

"Why did he need the money?"

"Debts," Constantine said. "Edwin was about our age, in his early forties. He'd been painting for twenty years, and had enjoyed a moderate success during the abstract craze, just before pop-art came in. Then his sales declined, but instead of cutting back, I'm afraid that he'd become set in a rather expensive way of living. And then there was all that trouble at home."

"What kind of trouble?"

"His wife wanted him to go back to work, as if painting

isn't. Get a job and pay the bills so she could continue her expensive way of living—that sort of thing. Ruins an artist, especially one who's already depressed. His sales had been steady, if no longer spectacular, so I loaned him thirty-seven hundred to pay off the bills and keep on painting." Constantine smiled again. "Just good business."

"Did Klamath drink?"

"Some, but not enough to be called a drunk."

"What about other women?"

"I wouldn't know." Constantine's smile began to look like rigor. "Really, Mr. Culp, I've told the police everything. Edwin left here about fifteen, sober and alone, and I was here with customers well after that."

"Routine. We have to investigate before authorizing settlements."

"Well, I wish you'd get it over with and pay me my claim."

"Are you in need of it quickly, Mr. Constantine?" Culp asked softly. "Perhaps for your business?"

It was the first and only time Culp saw the man fail to smile.

Culp was standing outside *The Constantinople* when the girl called to him. He'd been looking up the broad, elm-lined street toward a new medical

clinic at one end, then down to the old concrete courthouse and police station at the other, wondering if it would be worthwhile canvassing the few shops that were open or wait until they all were tomorrow morning. The girl's voice was a high-pitched whisper, timid and hesitant.

"S-Sir?"

Culp turned around. A thin, frail-looking blonde wearing a pullover and pleated skirt was in the narrow archway of the gallery, a stiff expression of self-consciousness on her pale face.

"I couldn't help overhearing you and Joel—Mr. Constantine. I'm his assistant, Marsha Fleming, and—" She paused, glancing over her shoulder and into the gallery.

"Miss Fleming, are you frightened of something?"

She turned back to Culp. "Oh, no, no. I just don't know if I should—" She bit her lower lip, then blurted: "He wasn't alone!"

"Who wasn't? Edwin Klamath?"

"I was working back in our warehouse when Mr. Klamath drove down the alley, right past me. There was somebody with him!"

"Who?"

"I, I couldn't tell. He was in the way, and I only had a single

glance. But sometimes there's a girl who—" She stopped again.

"What girl? Do you know her?"

"Oh dear, I've said too much already. I don't know if it was her, or if it was a girl at all. I don't have the faintest idea who was sitting next to him in the truck."

"What's this girl's name?"

"Now I've gotten her into trouble," Miss Fleming said miserably.

"No, you haven't," Culp said gently. "Please, tell me."

"Yvonne. Yvonne Montclair. She was the assistant before me. Then she began posing for Mr. Klamath in the, the altogether, and I don't know what-all after that. But she's been with Mr. Klamath quite a bit, even after she stopped working here."

"Do you know where Yvonne Montclair lives?"

"No, no I don't. Mr. Constantine doesn't even like the mention of her name. He'd be most upset if he learned I've been talking this way. But I have to go in now, I really must."

"Wait."

"I just wanted you to know Mr. Klamath had been with somebody. Good-bye." She slipped through the door without making a sound.

Culp stuck the end of a straw in his mouth, feeling

oddly as though he'd imagined the girl standing and talking to him. Then he considered what she'd said, about Klamath not being alone when he'd left, and the girl Joel Constantine would certainly have known. He wondered why the gallery owner might want to lie to him. Or, for that matter, why the ephemeral Miss Fleming might.

Yvonne Montclair was listed in the telephone book. Her address was a second-floor apartment in an uncomely middle-class tenement of dull red brick. She wasn't home.

She wasn't home.

Culp drove the short distance from her apartment back to Brotherton proper, saw that the shops which had been open during the afternoon were now closed for the evening, and continued on to his motel. He had an unintentionally bland meal and went to bed.

SAM CULP returned to his motel shortly before eleven ayem and found a message waiting for him to phone Sorensen.

The police lieutenant answered on the second ring.

"You busy?" he asked Culp.

"Not now. I spent the morning covering the shops around Constantine's gallery. Didn't learn anything new, though."

"Well, you will if you come down here."

"Yeah?"

"Things might just have blown apart."

Sorensen's office was the middle of a string of cubicles on the ground floor rear of the courthouse. It was mostly of wood. Wood paneling, desk, chairs, cabinets. Only the water cooler, typewriter, phone, and dirty window glass seemed to be made of other things. When Culp entered, he saw Sorensen as before, behind his desk, but in the other chair sat another man.

"This is Dr. Newhall Taylor," Sorensen introduced, "Edwin Klamath's dentist. Dr. Taylor, Sam Culp of Trans-National Adjustment."

Culp shook hands with the dentist. He was black-haired, tanned, and broad-shouldered, of medium height and middle age. He could have been handsomer if his face hadn't been so deeply creased with sharp, hard lines around his dark eyes and between his nose and upper lip. He was expensively dressed, very pressed of the suit and very shiny of the shoes.

"Dr. Taylor just came from the morgue," Sorensen said.

"And?"

"My charts match the teeth perfectly," the dentist answered.

"Coroner agrees, too," Sorenson added.

"Then it is Klamath?" Culp asked, reaching for another chair.

"Definitely." Dr. Taylor rose, offering his chair. "Here, I was about to leave anyway. Very behind in my schedule after all this. A week away. Been up at the resort at Great Gorge, you know. I seem to have two week's worth of catching up to do."

"Well, thanks for giving us a statement, Doctor," Sorenson said.

"Glad to. I'm only sorry there wasn't anything except teeth to go by." He shook his head gravely. "A tragic death, tragic. When my answering service told me this morning, I was quite shocked."

"Did you know Klamath well?" Culp asked him.

"No more than my other patients. But the death of any acquaintance is always disturbing, especially one as ghastly as this. Makes a person consider his own fate, don't you think?"

When the dentist had left, Culp turned to Sorenson and said: "Well?"

"Dr. Taylor is not what I had in mind. He arrived after you called and did a fine job of gluing everything back together." The lieutenant stood up and walked heavily toward a



side door, opened it and beckoned to somebody waiting in the next office. "Would you come in again, Barbano?"

A sallow-faced man with enormous red ears and a droopy, *bandito*-style mustache entered the room. He was wearing a once-white pair of coveralls and dark-stained work boots, and there was an oil company insignia stitched over his breast pocket. He stood nervously clenching his hands in front of him, his eyes hooded and blinking rapidly as though he'd stepped into a pool of harsh light.

"You finish giving your statement to Sergeant Dinsdale?"

"Yeah, signed and every-

thing," Barbano said. "Can I go now?"

"In a minute." Sorensen returned to his desk, sat down and said to Culp: "Richard Barbano works in a service station where Klamath often stopped."

"And where he bought the eight gallons of gas?"

"No, we're still checking around for that place. But in the process we found Richard here, who had an interesting story to tell."

"And I've told it," Barbano complained. "I've told it over and over, and it still means absolutely nothing far as I can see."

"Tell it again, Richard. How long did you know Klamath?"

Barbano sighed. "Six months about, ever since I went to work there. He'd come in and we'd get to talking, the way you do."

"Uh-huh. And what would you two talk about?"

"Well, nothing much at first. Cars, women, drinking, the usual stuff. Then about a month ago he started getting interested more in what I was doing and how I lived. Personal kind of things."

"What did you tell him?"

"Look, it's all down on paper. How come—"

"Did you tell him you're on parole, Richard?"

Barbano looked down at his shoes. "Yeah, I guess so."

"And that you lived by yourself?"

"He already knew that. That crummy rooming house ain't worth keeping a secret from nobody."

"And then what did Klamath do?"

"He offered me a job. About a week ago, he asked me if I wanted to drive his truck part-time for him. I turned him down."

"Why?"

"Hell, he's always behind with his bill at the station. I figured I've enough grief without trying to collect what he'd owe me. He wanted me to drive at night, too, and that would sort of bust up my fun. Don't get much as it is, not while on parole. Anyway, I couldn't see how he needed a driver much, and it sounded fishy to me, like it might be illegal or something."

"Sure," Sorensen said. "What were you in for, Richard?"

Barbano glanced up at the lieutenant. His eyes looked depthless. "Theft," he said tonelessly.

"And where's your closest living relative?"

"I've got an uncle in Austin, Texas. He don't give a damn."

"All right, you can leave,"

Sorensen said, shuffling some papers on his desk. "Oh, and Richard—"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for your cooperation."

"Anytime." Barbano was a door-slammer.

Sorensen finished moving his papers about and said to Culp, "I wanted you to see him as well as hear him. You notice anything?"

"What?"

"Richard Barbano's very close to the same age, weight, and general build as Edwin Klamath."

There was a long pause while Culp fished another straw out of his pocket, and then he said in a quiet voice, "A set-up."

"A sweetheart of one," Sorensen agreed. "Klamath couldn't hire Barbano, but it wouldn't have taken much to find another guy like him, a guy nobody would miss two seconds after he's gone. Klamath gets him to drive the truck, kills him and sets him on fire, then disappears, leaving his wife to collect sixth thousand badly needed dollars. Later she joins him somewhere, where he's painting under another name."

"But the man driving the truck was Klamath."

"No question about it," Sorensen said moodily. "Damn it, before Dr. Taylor ruined the

idea with his teeth charts, I thought for sure I was on the trail of a fat, juicy murder."

"Well, at least it explains why the four cans were there."

"Yeah, I suppose it does. I can't charge Mrs. Klamath with conspiracy; I can't prove anything. But there's some justice in knowing that the gas Klamath was planning to murder some poor innocent with burned him up instead."

"Ironic or not," Culp said, "it looks now to have been an accident more than ever. Halycon will still have to pay the widow."

"Maybe something else will break yet," Sorensen replied. "It's been a crazy case so far."

YVONNE MONTCLAIR arrived home after dark that evening, just before ten. Culp was waiting for her. He wasn't sure who the woman was until he saw the lights of her apartment switch on, and then he crossed the street from his car and knocked on her door.

The young woman who answered was a few inches shorter than him, about five feet seven. She had a full-breasted, full-hipped body with long legs muscled like a dancer's, and cropped hair of an improbable color. Culp guessed she was a two-tone blonde. She had the face of a girl under

twenty-five, but it was showing wear in spite of her heavy make-up. Her mascara-ed eyes were perceptably puffed around the lids and thick lashes, and tiny lines were beginning to threat out from their corners towards her temples.

"Are you Miss Montclair?"

"Yes."

"I'm Sam Culp of Trans-National Adjustment Bureau. I'd like to talk to you about Edwin Klamath."

"Insurance?"

"That's right."

"Don't tell me Ed left—" She paused, shaking her head. "No, girls like me get lots of things, but never the money. Come in."

The room was untidy and disordered, stuffy with too many pieces of heavy furniture arranged in too many wrong places. Yvonne Montclair swept a couple of women's magazines off one of the chairs and gestured for Culp to sit down, then slipped off her shoes and tucked her legs under her on the sofa facing him.

"Forgive the mess, Mr. Culp. I've not been in the mood to do much since Ed died."

"I understand you met him while working at *The Constantiople*."

"Eighteen months ago this coming Thursday. I'd seen Ed before that, of course, but that

was when I first really knew him."

"You knew him well?"

She gazed at Culp with tired hazel eyes. "Very."

"You began posing for him then?"

"I never did. Painting is only the artist's variation of see-the-etchings routine." She gave a wry little smile. "It worked," she said, then: "You've been talking to Joel Constantine, haven't you?"

"A little."

"Joel is a fool." Yvonne looked at a run in her stockings and laughed. "You know, Joel once offered Ed a lot of money to stop seeing me. Ed said sure he would, because he needed the money, but soon as he had it in his pocket, he was back up here with me."

"Why did Constantine care about you and Ed?"

"He thought I was his. There was a time I guess I gave Joel reason to, but after it was over, he wouldn't take no."

"This money offer," Culp said. "He made it about a year ago?"

"Yes. I quit the gallery a little after that. It got to be too much, all his pleading and bickering. And his hands."

"Did Mrs. Klamath ever find out?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure she'd have cared if she had.



That woman's sole interests are her fine home in the canyon and her Missus in front of a fancy name. Ed the person, the man, never mattered."

"But it did to you?"

"Everything," Yvonne said fervently. "Funny; she'll get every bit of him now, but if Ed hadn't died, she'd have gotten nothing."

"You mean Ed was planning to leave her?"

"We loved each other," she said as though it justified everything. "We were going to go away, California maybe, start all over."

"When was this to have happened? Last Friday?"

She frowned, tilting her head slightly. "No, not for another couple of weeks or so. Why did you ask that?"

"You were seen in his truck with him just before the accident."

"I was what?"

Culp shrugged philosophically.

"Look, you know what a *Bombe Surprise* is, Mr. Culp?"

"Sure. It's a very large, mold-shaped dessert."

"Well, there's twenty-seven men in Union City who won't like it," she said, "but if they have to they'll testify that I was the surprise in their lodge dinner's *Bombe*."

Culp took a straw out of his pocket and began chewing on it reflectively. If Yvonne Montclair hadn't been with Klamath, who had been? Or had anybody? And that still didn't answer another...

"What are you doing?" Yvonne asked.

"The straw? To keep from smoking, that's all."

She seemed pleased with that. "I despise smoking. The smell on the breath, burns in the clothes—disgusting habit. Ed never smoked; it was one of the things which attracted me to him."

"Uh-huh." Culp moved the

straw around in his mouth and watched the girl carefully. He said, "Klamath was going to commit murder for you. How'd you feel about that?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said coldly, but the shock wasn't there.

"Way it seemed at first, his wife had to be in on his scheme so he could collect the insurance. But if he was going to run off with you, that didn't make much sense. So maybe he wasn't after the money as much as to get out from under a sticky divorce. She'd have money and no questions, and you two would be free. Was that it?"

Yvonne didn't say a word. Culp continued, "Or maybe Klamath had been lying to you, and he never planned to take you anywhere."

That still failed to jolt the girl. Her face only got tighter, her eyes narrowing into small, flashing pin-points.

"Then again, maybe it was a double-cross," Culp went on. "You'd disappear with him, and when his wife came with the insurance money later, you two would take the money and she'd end up dead. Which was it, Yvonne?"

She still didn't say anything."

"Either here or down at the police station, Yvonne."

"If you had more than just talk," she said in a low, hard voice, "I'd be down there already. I'm not saying another thing."

"I'm giving you a chance to tell your side, Yvonne, but I can't force you to. If you're smart, you will, but suit yourself."

She suited herself by remaining silent. She stayed tight-lipped and mute the rest of the time Culp was with her.

BUT YVONNE had said enough, Culp thought as he drove away from her apartment. He hadn't caught the connection when he'd first heard it, but only now as he mulled over their conversation. It wasn't enough by itself, but it might provide the lever to pry the truth out, if Culp was willing to take the chance using it. Culp was.

The house was built on a shallow outcropping half-way up one long slope of Hurwitz Canyon. It was tiered and multi-level, befitting the jagged and wild countryside, made of wood and stone and large plate glass windows.

Mrs. Klamath answered the door, fully dressed but saying she'd been preparing to go to bed.

"May I come in?" Culp asked her.

"I'd rather you wouldn't. What do you want?"

"The lighter."

"The—? What lighter?"

"The lighter which was part of your husband's effects; the one you signed for yesterday at the police station."

"Oh." She frowned and said disagreeably, "Come back after the funeral, Mr. Culp. I've no time for you until then."

"I'm afraid this is too important for me to wait, Mrs. Klamath. I don't think your husband died accidentally, and I think I can prove it."

"Oh, God, first Lieutenant Sorensen and now you! All you're trying to do is cheat me out of my settlement! Why—" She shut her mouth suddenly and stared out at Culp standing under the porch lamp; then cautiously, "What's it got to do with the lighter?"

"I just found out that your husband never smoked."

"So?"

"He'd have no' reason to carry a lighter, would he?"

"He—he was thinking of taking up a pipe. I bought it for him as a present."

"When?"

"Last Thursday. Yes, the day before he died."

"Uh-huh. Where did you buy it?"

"What does it matter?"

"It was an expensive, oddly

shaped lighter which only a few stores around here would carry."

"What difference does that make?"

"If you don't want to tell me, a sales slip shouldn't be hard to find, even from as far back as a year or so."

"What are you suggesting? That I—"

"I want that lighter, Mrs. Klamath," Culp said harshly. "Now."

"You—you can't have it."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't have it here. It's at the mortuary. I'm planning to bury Eddie's things with him."

"But you can get it tomorrow morning, can't you?"

She glared at Culp with wide, frightened eyes, her face drawing haggard and pitifully stubborn. "Yes. I can get it for you then."

"Bring it to the station. I want to show it to Lieutenant Sorensen and see what he thinks of my idea."

"Yes, yes, anything you want. Now please go away."

Culp watched her shut the door, and then he walked to his car. He drove down the winding gravel driveway to Hurwitz Canyon Boulevard and then pulled over to the side of the road and parked. Only a few cars passed now and then, their

headlamps failing to spotlight his own darkened sedan. Culp settled down to wait.

It was one of those things almost impossible to judge correctly. If he'd told Mrs. Klamath everything he'd surmised, she could have called his bluff, and he didn't have the necessary evidence to accuse her outright. She hadn't, so now Culp was worried that he had said too little and that she'd calm down after a momentary panic and do nothing. It had to be a proper combination of the known and unknown before the widow could be goaded into action.

The action would, Culp hoped, disclose Mrs. Klamath's lover. She might go to him, or he might come to the house, but either way Culp would be ready to see who it was. That she had a lover Culp was certain; it was the only conceivable answer. It frustrated him not to know who, and as he sat in the car he chewed a short piece of straw and reviewed all he knew and assumed in an effort to ferret out some detail he'd overlooked. He was also bothered by the original murder plot Klamath himself had hatched. Ed Klamath hadn't been a stupid man, and yet the way he'd set it up, it couldn't have possibly worked because—

Damn! That was it! Culp suddenly realised what Klamath had done and who his widow's lover was, who that elusive man had to be. He didn't have to stay here any longer; he could go straight to Sorensen with the answers. A little digging, a little leaning, and the proof would be obtained.

Culp bent forward to turn the ignition key, but as he did the door flew open and a pistol muzzle was pressed against his side. He couldn't tell who it was from his position, but he didn't need to.

"Hands on the wheel. Slowly."

Culp wrapped his hands around the steering wheel and froze.

"I'm getting in the back," the voice said. "If the door's locked, use your left hand to push the button up, but don't turn around."

"It's open," Culp said, and inwardly cursed his carelessness.

The door behind him closed, then, "Drive towards Brother-ton."

Culp waited for a truck to pass before swinging his car around and starting back along the Boulevard. He reached up casually and adjusted the rear view mirror so he could see the man. He asked, "Same place as you killed Klamath, Dr. Taylor?"

"Yes," the dentist, Newhall Taylor said. "It'll look like you were investigating and went a little too far."

"Sorensen will never buy it," he said.

"It can't be helped. The risk will have to be taken."

"Who figured I'd be waiting? You or her?"

"She did. She's clever that way. She phoned after you left and said it was probably a trap and that she had stalled you and for me to look around. You'd have to've been dealt with anyway."

"Uh-huh. I know too much." Culp drove on a bit, then added, "I didn't tell Mrs. Klamath, but I'd also recalled your lighter's inscription: *With Love, Sharon*. No wonder she'd been so desperate to get her husband's things back when she saw it there. She'd obviously given you the lighter some time ago, and a canvassing of jewelry stores could very well have produced a sales record for it. Once that was connected with the fact her husband never smoked, his girl-friend had never seen him use that or any other lighter, and its presence at the fire, it would tie her directly to a lover and a murderer."

"You're the only one who's figured it out, though," the dentist said. "But your little

trick didn't work. Sharon never panics."

"No, but you did when you dropped your lighter the night you killed Klamath."

"Did you know it was me all along?"

"No. It wasn't until I'd thought over Klamath's own scheme that I saw it had to be you. Klamath had planned to switch somebody for himself, burn the body beyond recognition, and then disappear, letting his wife collect the insurance. Only to succeed, he had to devise a way of getting around identification by the teeth, the same way he was identified. Which meant his dentist had to be in on it, a dentist who receives pretty lighters from his mistress."

"Sharon talked him into bribing me," Dr. Taylor said. "She saw that if we moved before he did, we could use his plan to our benefit. And Edwin was fooling around with his peroxide blonde so much he never suspected his own wife was tired of staying home alone."

Culp thought fleetingly of the similar double-cross death which Klamath and Yvonne Montclair had probably been planning for the wife, and he sighed, shaking his head. Now he knew it had been Dr. Taylor who Marsha Fleming had seen

in the truck. No doubt the dentist had returned from his vacation to meet with Klamath, probably to discuss Klamath's plot. Then he'd ridden home with him until they reached the proper spot, hit him with the pistol and rolled the truck over, then gone back to wherever he'd hidden his car.

"You know," Culp said casually, "Great Gorge is too far away to make it on a single tank of gas."

"The cliff is up ahead," the dentist said from the back.

Culp could see the rising walls on his right and the deepening chasm on his left as the road wound deeper into Hurwitz Canyon. Soon, perhaps around the next bend, would be the downward curve he'd seen in the police photo yesterday. He stroked his jaw, feeling his cheeks clammy and cold. He thought about what he could do.

He glanced in the rear view mirror and saw the dentist squeeze the bridge of his nose with the fingers of his free hand and move forward restlessly on the seat.

"Nervous, Taylor?" he grinned at the mirror. "You should be. Sorenson will find out where you stopped for gas last Friday and nail you that way, even if he never catches on about the lighter."

"No, no he won't. Once you're gone, we're safe."

"Or he'll wonder why your answering service couldn't reach you after the supposed accident. That's all he has to do, Taylor, wonder as I did, and it'll all fall into place for him."

"We're here," the dentist said. "Slow down."

Culp saw the photographed curve dead ahead. His headlights shone out over the cliff's rim, out into the deep, black maw he was heading for.

"Your real mistake was setting Klamath on fire," he said. "There wasn't any need to hide who he was."

"I know. But he'd stopped his truck too far from the edge, and I had to push it uphill. Something inflammable had spilled; I didn't notice it when I lit a cigarette. The truck was on fire before I got it over the edge. It was an accident."

"A cigarette!" Culp laughed maliciously. "Well, I'll be damned."

"Shut up. I'm not going to make that same mistake twice. Drive right up to the edge and put the car in *Park*, you hear?"

Culp licked his now parched lips, knowing what was going to happen the instant he put the car into *Park*. He could sense the dentist moving on the seat behind him, tensed to chop the gun barrel across the right side

of his head. There would be a flash of stunning pain, the weightlessness of falling, and then—

Now he could feel the front tires dipping into the gravel of the soft shoulder. What chance did he have? He was nearly forty years old, out of shape, out of step.

“Stop.”

Culp could no longer see the cliff edge from over the nose of the hood. He tapped the power brakes gently, slowing. Then he snapped the transmission lever up into *Park* position and immediately back down into *Low*. The sedan lurched, sending the dentist slightly off balance. Culp already had his left hand on the door release. He shouldered the door as the gun scraped along his scalp, tearing skin from his ear and biting savagely into the muscles of his neck. His right arm went numb.

“Culp!”

Culp was out, sprawling head-long onto the gravel; clawing, digging, grasping to keep from falling over the edge inches away; trying desperately to right himself before Taylor could jump out and shoot him point-blank. But the dentist had

wanted the car too close to the edge for his second murder, and he'd only had time for an instinctive reaction of reaching for Culp.

Culp twisted around into a crouch to see the sedan, moving forward in low gear, teeter on the brink, Taylor's face pressed against the door glass as he now frantically worked the handle with panicked fingers.

The car slid over, and began smashing itself against the same boulders, brush, and trees which had destroyed Klamath's truck. It rolled, buckled, tore its way down into the deep ravine, and when it hit the rocky canyon bottom, it exploded into a red, long-tailed comet.

Culp staggered to the cliff edge, wiping the trickles of blood from his own lacerated flesh, his stomach churning as he heard a wild-animal cry from the incinerating car below. He began scrambling down the face of the steep slope, hoping what he heard was an animal cry. He remembered Dr. Taylor's words in the police station about considering one's own fate, and he hoped for the dentist's sake, he was dead before the car had burned.

The ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month



THE SISTERS

*Her very name spelled Beauty. But
she had an ugly sister—Death...*

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

EDNA and Maxine Tillotson weren't twins; Edna was the older by a year. But they looked amazingly alike. Both had dark, wavy hair, worn in the same way, rather bulbous grey eyes, short straight noses, full lips with a dimple at one corner when they smiled. Even their voices and their walk were replicas. People were always mistaking one of them for the other.

When Joe Harwich came courting to the big old house where the girls lived together after their parents had died, nobody was sure which sister he was after. No one doubted that lazy, charming Joe was after the Tillotson money, but he would never have married a woman, however rich, to whom he was not attracted.

In the end, he married Edna. But he too became one of the

household in the big house, and the confusion persisted. The mean and cynical hinted at bigamy. Joe Harwich must have been aware of the gossip. All three of them must have been aware, but no comment or reply was ever made. To all outward appearances, Joe and Edna were a conventionally happy couple, and Edna's sister lived comfortably with her and her brother-in-law.

Other men came courting Maxine, but she never accepted any of them. The three went together to the theater and to concerts and art shows in the city—there was only a movie house in their small town—but they had very little purely social life. After all, the Tillotson money had come from wholesale meat, so they weren't exactly in what was then still called society. Harwich's best friend was Police Chief Floyd Rogers, who had gone to school with all three of them, and with his own wife, Harriet.

Things went on this way for twelve years. Everybody grew older, of course, and the sisters weathered the years well. Joe had acquired a paunch and was balding. The sisters were still very attractive women, and still remarkably alike in appearance.

And then Maxine—or was it Edna—suddenly disappeared.

What it amounted to, as far as the neighbors and the tradesmen with whom they dealt were concerned, was simply that from one day on, the three of them were never again seen together. The household now consisted of Joe and one of the sisters. No explanations were offered. Indeed there were few who felt themselves sufficiently on terms of intimacy to inquire; but gossip, which for years had died down, revived.

Had Maxine gone off with one of her suitors? Had she become ill and died and been privately buried? Or was it Edna who had fled or died, leaving her sister as Joe's surrogate wife?

Of course the next rumor was that Edna had been murdered. By her husband, naturally, aided and abetted by his sister-in-law, so that Joe could carry on an affair with Maxine—posing-as-Edna.

Or else the two of them had murdered Maxine, or one of them had, and the other one was loyally covering the crime. But in either case, how and why?

"Somebody ought to report it," people muttered.

But report what? Suppose the Harwich's said Maxine had gone on a trip to foreign parts, and what business was it of the

inquirer's anyway? There was no evidence whatever of foul play, and no excuse for a search to discover whose clothing and belongings, if anybody's, were missing.

Joe and one of the sisters continued to be seen abroad as regularly as always. Nobody dared a direct question, and nothing was vouched.

Mrs. Perkins, who lived next door and with whom neither the Tillotsons nor the Harwiches had ever been very neighborly, spread the preposterous rumor that there never had been two sisters at all, just one with two names—which was utter nonsense, since plenty of people had known both of them. Then Mrs. Perkins began to gossip about a night when she had seen Joe digging by moonlight in his front garden. When that came to Joe's ears he went straight to Police Chief Rogers.

"Certainly I was digging and probably she saw me. She spends half her time spying on us," he said furiously. "I'd just bought some rose bushes and I didn't want them to stay out of the ground all night. There was a full moon and I dug up the plot and planted them.

"Any time you want, Floyd, send somebody to dig under my roses and see if there's a body buried there, as long as he puts

them back and doesn't injure them. And you can tell that old pest for me that if she keeps on saying this kind of thing I'm going to sue her for slander."

Rogers laughed. "Put up a spite fence between your houses," he advised. "That will cost less than a damage suit and keep her from watching everything you do."

Nevertheless, he was human and he couldn't help asking: "But Joe, whatever did happen to Maxine?"

"I wish I knew," Joe said. "Edna and I aren't much on talking, but I can level with you. She just walked out on us one night. No notice, no note, and she left most of her clothes behind her."

"Was there a quarrel?"

"Certainly not. Edna has been half sick worrying about her. Every time the phone rings she runs toward it, thinking it might be Maxine."

"Do you want us to take it up?"

"We'd rather not—not yet, anyway." Joe Harwich sounded embarrassed. "There are so many possibilities. Give it another week or so. I'll tell you if we decide that's the way to handle it."

"You may be right," said Rogers. "Maxine was always a bit unpredictable."

As he watched Joe Harwich

leave, he kept remembering how attached both the Tillotson girls were to the old house, in which they had been born and their father and grandfather before them. It would take a lot to make either of them leave it voluntarily.

Against his will, something bothered him and he couldn't quite place it. If Maxine had been killed or badly injured in an accident, her sister would have been notified by now. Or in a town of this size, if there had been a man involved with Maxine—or Edna—the grapevine would have known about it, Mrs. Perkins first of all. Maxine wasn't a young girl running away to "do her thing!" the sisters were well past the deadline of thirty.

Rogers decided to go there soon and talk to the two of them together. Then he put the problem in the back of his mind to be ruminated over when he was free of more pressing jobs. Meanwhile he would make Mrs. Perkins understand, the next time he ran into her, that it wasn't advisable to gossip too much, with no foundation, about her neighbors.

Time kept running on, and nothing new happened.

Then all hell broke loose.

Somebody's corpse, that of a youngish woman, dead for a year, was dug up in a vacant lot

three blocks from the Tillotson house by a curious dog newly moved into the neighborhood. White and shaking, Joe and Edna Harwich were brought to look at it.

The black hair: yes. The sodden rags of clothing: all Edna could say was that they resembled garments her sister had worn. But then they found a cameo pin—once their mother's—That had been Maxine's.

It was a field day for Mrs. Perkins and her ilk. Suppose Edna had been killed, and then her murderer—presumably Joe or Maxine or both—had planted the cameo pin? And taken the wedding ring off her finger and transferred it to Maxine's?

Neither of the sisters had ever broken a bone. Neither had ever had anything but the most trifling work done on her excellent teeth. There had been no occasion for either of them to have been fingerprinted.

There was one further possibility: Maxine was at least supposed to be a virgin. But the body was too decomposed for the pathologist to be sure.

Only one thing was certain: the victim had died as the result of a heavy blow that had fractured the back of her skull.

Floyd Rogers was now in the middle of it, whether he liked it or not. All of a sudden the

itchy, scratchy something in his mind came clearly into reach.

It was what old Doc Gullem had said at the wedding reception, two years before he died.

Not exactly *said*—nothing would have made Old Doc betray the doctor-patient relationship. No, he had muttered it to himself, standing with his third glass in his hand, and the police chief, standing near, had overheard it. Not that he had repeated it, then or ever.

"Joe's so fond of kids. It's a pity he didn't marry the one who could have given him babies."

Well. That meant, if Floyd Rogers knew anything, Edna Tillotson must have had a hysterectomy. Unless she was naturally sterile, but how would a small town general practitioner have had occasion to discover that?

One couldn't check up on the poor mouldering remains dug up in the vacant lot. No operation scar would show by now. But if Edna *was* Edna—

How to find out? He'd rather not, but he was a policeman.

His lips puckered in a soundless whistle, Rogers dialed the number of the town's only hospital and asked for Dr. McKim.

Rodney McKim tripled in

brass. He was head of the hospital's surgical department, had a private practice, and when needed—which was seldom—served as police surgeon.

Frowning across the chief's desk at headquarters, he said, "Now, Floyd, you know better than that. We can't give you access to the X-ray files of a



patient who has no criminal charge against her."

"I don't want your files," said Rogers impatiently. "What I want is an abdominal X-ray of the woman now living in the Tillotson house as Mrs. Harwich."

"Just how do you propose doing that? I can't send for Mrs. Harwich and X-ray her by force!"

"Look," Rogers went on, "this isn't a game. Somebody murdered whoever was buried in that vacant lot. I have reason to think Edna Harwich once had a hysterectomy. So if the victim was Edna, and Maxine

now is posing as her sister and Joe Harwich's wife, that throws the onus of suspicion directly on her, or them. If the corpse is really Maxine's, that throws the case wide open again, though the Harwiches would still be under suspicion."

McKim shook his head. "I'll think about it," he said, "but it sounds impossible."

It wasn't necessary. It became obvious very soon that the present Mrs. Harwich was pregnant. So she was Maxine.

And Edna was dead—murdered.

Floyd Rogers wished with unpolicemanlike fervor that he didn't live and function in a small town where people knew one another all their lives.

"Now we have motive and opportunity," he reflected bitterly, "but absolutely no solid evidence."

The house was full of blunt objects capable of fracturing skulls, and every one of them would supply fingerprints from all three.

It must have been Joe who buried the body, presumably by moonlight, but they were both in it, whichever struck the actual blow: one as murderer, the other as accessory, at least.

Why hadn't Joe and Maxine left town and gone into hiding before Edna's body was discovered? Probably that im-

movable attachment of both girls to the old Tillotson house.

Rogers found himself thinking another unpolicemanlike thought—if polygamy were only legal in America the murder would never have taken place.

But it wasn't, and it had, and now it was up to him to find enough evidence against two lifelong friends to persuade a grand jury to bring a murder indictment against one or both of them.

"Joe," he said, almost apologetically, "you know we've got to go into this thing."

"Sure," said Joe.

Maxine, by now heavily pregnant, nodded.

"So let's start by a thorough search of the house. It will be easier on you if you'll both co-operate."

"This is my house," Maxine objected sullenly. "My great-grandfather built it. You can't just run over it roughshod and tear it to pieces."

"Shut up, Maxine!" That, unexpectedly, was Joe. And he was calling her by her right name.

Rogers kept the shock out of his voice. "Joe's right," he reminded her. "Look, Maxine, you might as well face reality. I'll be as easy on you as I can, but I have my duties and responsibilities as a police officer. If you were my sister

instead of an old friend, or Joe my brother, I'd still either have to try to find evidence against whoever killed Edna or resign my office. And if I did that, heaven help you with anyone else as chief here."

"We have no choice, Maxine," Joe said heavily. "What do you want, Floyd?"

"I want to bring my technical team to search the house thoroughly, and I want your co-operation so I don't have to ask for a search warrant and alert the news media."

Maxine nodded reluctantly.

Rogers stood up. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to call in a man to stand watch till we get back here. I suppose if you were going to destroy any evidence you've already done so, but I can't take a chance on your destroying any more of it. That is if evidence exists," he added. "May I use your phone?"

The two sat in silence as the chief gave his orders. He could have stayed himself instead of posting a cop, but the whole performance was becoming entirely too painful for everybody.

"I'll be back soon," he said abruptly, and departed.

Actually, he hadn't the slightest idea of what he could possibly find. "Damn it," he muttered to himself, "I wish

this was a big city. I wish Joe Harwich and his family were strangers. I wish I'd studied law instead."

None of which wishes was likely to come true. He had to suppress his private feelings, and use his brain.

There was nothing at first search, as he had expected. The fingerprints of all of them were all over the place, and the house was full of blunt objects capable of bashing a skull. He could have all of them tested for traces of blood, but what chance was there that the real weapon hadn't already been disposed of?

What else, then? Something, however hidden and however unlikely, that could tie Maxine to her sister's death. He was pretty sure it was Maxine. Knowing Joe, easy-going, malleable, and evasive, he was more likely to be only an accessory after the crime. Adultery, yes! But murder and Joe Harwich didn't go together. Undoubtedly Edna had found out about the affair and objected. Joe would have got out from under as best he could. It was Maxine who shared with Edna the explosive Tillotson temper.

Rogers half wished he would fail, could let the whole thing go by default, the murder forever unsolved. He had to keep on looking. And he found

what he didn't want to find in the room that had been Maxine's before she moved into the one that had been Joe's and Edna's.

He was working with Jim Andrews, the best of his small detective force.

"Looke here, Chief," Andrews said suddenly. "Do you notice that one of these window sills has been painted a lot later than the other?"

"It sure has. The other one has all the paint worn off it."

The chief stared at it some more. He sighed deeply.

"Let's not just scrape it," he said. "Get a saw and take off the surface for at least half an inch down."

They had no proper facilities for intensive scientific testing of this sort, but they could borrow the services of the nearest city.

He left men on guard, front and back, of the Tillotson house. But there was little danger of the Harwiches trying to leave; both of them were very subdued.

Rogers had never felt unhappier in his entire career.

Under the paint was human blood, which had been washed and scrubbed and scraped, but not enough; it had soaked into the wood. It was Maxine's type, but it was Edna's type too, and who would go to such pains to

conceal traces of her own blood?

She and Joe both understood what it meant when the wooden slab was sawed off and taken away. When Floyd Rogers returned, they were ready to talk.

"All right, Floyd," Joe said. "I know you'll do the best you can for us. As you said, you've got to do your duty."

"Wait a minute," Rogers said. "You don't have to—"

"We know all that," Joe was impatient. "Of course we'll get a good lawyer if we need one. We don't need one now, and if you'll spell out for us exactly what the prospects are, we'll plead guilty or nolo contendere or whatever you call it and take our medicine from a judge without a jury."

The chief gestured to the police stenographer he had brought with him.

"Let me start from the beginning," Joe said.

They had obviously talked it over. Maxine sat silent, but their glances had crossed and she had nodded.

"When I first came here courting, I scarcely knew which of the girls I was after, they were so much alike. Gradually I realized it was Maxine. Then Edna lied to me.

"It sounds conceited, but I guess she wanted me too.

Anyway, one time when I was alone with her, and we were discussing the future, to which she had resigned herself, so far as Maxine and I could see, I said something about what a wonderful aunt she'd be to the kids I'd set my heart upon. And suddenly she blurted out, 'Not with my sister. She's had an operation.'

"I had no reason to suspect she was lying. I was heartsick, not from the disappointment, but because I thought Maxine had deliberately deceived me. I couldn't bring myself to talk to her about it. I lied in my turn and said I'd made an awful mistake and I couldn't go ahead with it, that I knew now it had been Edna all the time. Maxine was too proud to show how it had hit her; she set me free and she was maid of honor at our wedding and she kept on living here."

Where else? Rogers reflected: the Tillotson girls clung to the big house.

"And then, when a year went by with no baby in sight, Edna laughed and told me the truth.

"You can imagine what happened next. I know I sound like a coward and a cad. But I couldn't get a divorce or an annulment and marry Maxine. It would have killed Edna to have it all made public.

"I never touched Edna again. Neither Maxine nor I could discuss it with her, but we took it for granted that she understood and bowed to the inevitable. Only she didn't. Against all reason she became insanely jealous.

"There are plenty of rooms in this house. I took one by myself. I would go to Maxine's room and come back to my own. One night Maxine and I fell sound asleep. Edna woke up, sneaked out of bed, opened my door, and found the room empty." His voice dropped.

Maxine cut in, "I'll take it from here, Floyd.

"She went after us like a tiger. I woke up to vicious blows on my face. I jumped up and tried to get hold of her and calm her down. There wasn't much noise and it took a while to waken Joe. He was groggy and we kept on struggling while he pulled himself together and tried to help me. Edna kept beating and clawing at me.

"Then she punched me in the eye and it really hurt. I summoned all my strength and pushed her away from me. I was shaking and I could hardly breathe. By now Joe was on his feet. Edna came after me again and he gave her another push—or I guess you'd say he slugged her, to get her away from me.



"We were near the window. She stumbled and fell backwards, and her head hit the edge of the window sill hard. I can hear that awful crack yet. She fell in a heap on the floor. The blood just spouted out.

"She was unconscious, but she was alive. We didn't dare call a doctor—what could we tell him? We did everything we could from our memories of first aid, but twenty minutes later we knew she was dead." Maxine shuddered.

Joe took up the story. "We were both half out of our minds. We talked it over and decided there was only one thing we could do. I got the garden spade and Maxine took a flashlight. We packed Edna somehow into the back seat of the car and I drove to that vacant lot. It was 4 a.m. and bright moonlight; we hadn't needed the flash. Maxine stood sentinel. I dug the grave and we put her in it together and then I covered it up and smoothed it off, with the grass and weeds on top again. Then we drove home and started cleaning. There was blood on the rug so we burned it in the incinerator the next day."

"It wasn't till daylight that I saw the blood on the windowsill," said Maxine. "By then it had soaked in, and we couldn't get it all off. All our window

frames and sills need painting—they've worn bare—and we haven't got around to taking care of it. I found what was left of some white paint Joe had used to touch up the old medicine chest. There was just enough to cover that sill. I never expected anyone would notice, there in my room; we just wanted to get the stains out of our own sight."

"So now you have it, Floyd," said Joe heavily. "Give us the lowdown."

Rogers turned to the stenographer. "Go on back and type that up, Mattie," he said. "We'll be bringing them in soon and I'll want the typescript."

When they were alone he said wearily, "Forget the adultery charge. There's a state law but I never heard of its being enforced. So about her death. You can hardly get away with self-defense, not two against one, and that one a woman, no matter how she attacked you. But if you both swear exactly to what you've confessed here, it looks to me as if a manslaughter charge would cover it."

"How much time would that mean, Floyd?"

"I'm not the judge. The maximum for manslaughter in this state is ten years. You might get only five or six, and certainly Maxine ~~might~~ and UNZ. Of course they'll talk. Did

with good behavior you'd probably be paroled before that."

"My baby!" Maxine cried sharply. "What about my baby?"

"I doubt if you'll be tried before it's born. You may be out on bail. Manslaughter is bailable. If not, you won't have it in jail; you'll be taken to the hospital. Under guard, of course."

"And then must I give it up?"

"I'm not giving up our child," Joe said. "But who's going to take care of it till we get out and are together again? I can't face having our kid spend its first years in any institution."

"Well," Floyd Rogers said hesitantly, "this is the screwiest case I've ever handled, so let's make it screwier. Harriet and I have made a pretty good job of raising our three, I think. We've actually discussed this as a possibility, and she's willing. If you are, we'd take the kid on and be its foster parents till the real ones were free and able to marry and make a home for it."

"Oh, Floyd!" Maxine cried. She jumped to her feet and kissed him on the cheek.

"And of course we'd pay all the expenses," Joe said. "But won't people talk?"

you think they wouldn't? This isn't some tight-up suburb. There are plenty of people here who have known all of us all our lives. They'll understand, even sympathize. I won't lose my job; and by the time you're both out and can move away with the kid—"

"Move away!" exclaimed Maxine indignantly. "This is my home. Do you think I'd ever give up the house my great-grandfather built?" Joe smiled sheepishly.

I'll be darned, Floyd Rogers thought. I bet this old dump means more to her than her man or her baby! Aloud, all he said was, "You can have the house taken care of and kept in good condition. You'll have your lawyer for all the arrangements of that kind.

"All right. Each of you pack a bag and we'll get going."

"Just one more thing, Floyd." Joe looked embarrassed. "Where is Edna now?"

"In the morgue, what's left of her," Rogers said brutally.

Joe Harwich flinched, but he ploughed on. "I know. It sounds crazy. There can't be a funeral, of course, but I'd like her to be buried again, decently, this time, in the cemetery, with a stone."

"That can be managed," the police chief said. Incredibly when he glanced at Maxine, for

the first time he saw tears in her eyes.

"When we were little," she said brokenly, "we were just like twins."

The day before they pleaded guilty before Judge Barton, they were married by him in his office, with the jail guards as their witnesses. Their two-month-old son, whom they had named Floyd Joseph, would be legitimate.

When little Floyd was old enough, Harriet Rogers used to take him out sometimes to the cemetery.

"That's your Aunt Edna's grave," she told him. "She was your mother's sister."

After he could read, she never took him. She didn't want questions about the inscription on the stone: "Edna Tillotson Harwich" and the dates. He knew his name was Harwich too. He knew his father and mother had to go on a long trip and leave him with dear Harriet and Big Floyd and the Rogers children, who were just like family. Some day they would come back, as soon as they could.

Harriet and Big Floyd loved him, and he loved them. But his own father and mother loved him best of anybody. The three of them would live together in a wonderful place, a sort of dream castle, that he knew well

from the outside, but whose doors and windows were locked until the owners could come home and live in it again. It was known locally as the Old Tillotson House.

Once when he and Tommy Rogers were playing in its front garden, Mrs. Perkins, next door, came to the fence and started chattering something. "Let's go!" said Tommy abruptly, and pulled him right out to the street.

"Don't ever listen to her," he admonished Little Floyd. "My mother says she's a bad old witch." After that Little Floyd was afraid of Mrs. Perkins and ran if she tried to talk to him.

When he grew up, he was going to be a policeman like Big Floyd. But in New York or somewhere else big. In a little place like this, he would never have any really exciting cases like the ones he saw on TV.



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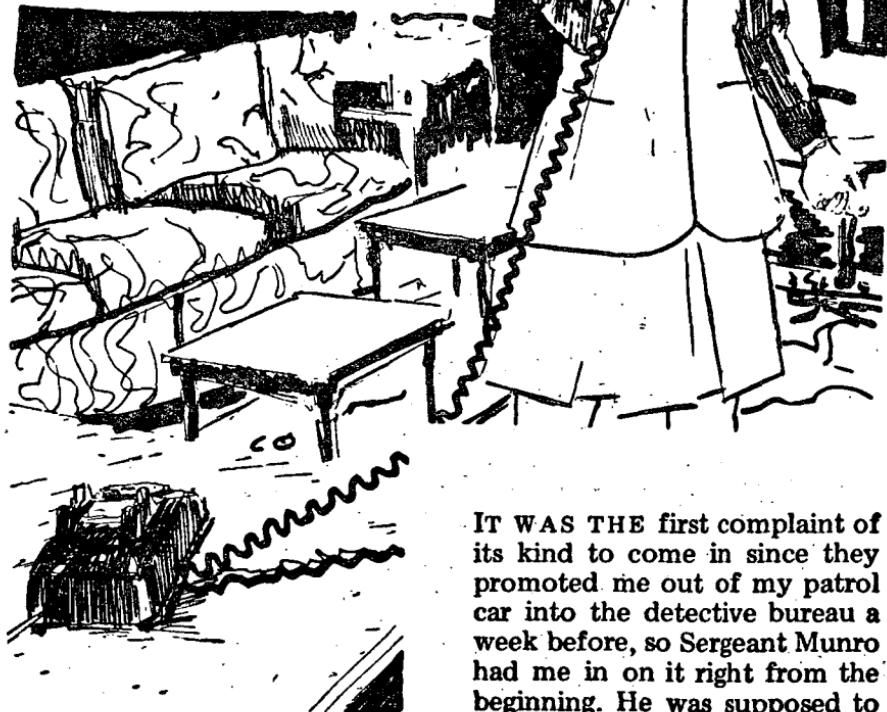
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Taunting, obscene, the voice came to her in the night. Could I still it—in time to save her?

Listen for the Dial Tone

by JAMES HOLDING



IT WAS THE first complaint of its kind to come in since they promoted me out of my patrol car into the detective bureau a week before, so Sergeant Munro had me in on it right from the beginning. He was supposed to

ride herd on me, break me in, show me the ropes on my new job until I got the hang of how the plainclothes division worked. With that end in view, my desk was temporarily placed edge to edge with his, and we faced each other across the double width.

When the girl walked into the squad room, I recognized her right away. I'd seen her often when I was a patrolman, and she wasn't the kind of woman you'd be likely to forget once you'd seen her.

She was a dish, in fact. Creamy complexion, dark hair, deep blue eyes. And under the uniform she wore, you could see that there were plenty of other goodies.

She was a policewoman named Cora Simmons, and where I'd seen her was standing guard at the Main and White intersection opposite Colfax Elementary School, shepherding the kids safely across the street four times a day.

She was what the kids called a Ladycop.

She came across the squad room toward Sergeant Munro and me, and apparently remembered seeing me somewhere before, too, because she raised a hand and said, "Hi" to me as she approached.

Sergeant Munro, who was very proper in his stiff Scottish

way, stood up politely until she seated herself in the hard chair beside his desk. Then he sat down again and said, "Good morning."

"I'm Cora Simmons," she said to Munro.

Like any rookie, anxious to show off how much he knows, I said, "She's the school guard at the Main and White intersection."

Munro nodded patiently and said to Cora. "This is Detective Korelski. I guess you know him." Detective Korelski. That was me. It had a funny sound after being Patrolman Korelski for three years.

Cora said, "I've seen him around, Sergeant. Congratulations on your promotion, Detective Korelski."

"Thanks," I said, feeling like a fool.

"Korelski's learning the ropes here," Munro explained. "What can we do for you, Cora?"

"Well, I have a complaint." She smiled.

Munro raised his eyebrows. "A cop with a complaint! That's a switch. What's your beef, Cora?"

She seemed faintly embarrassed. "I've been getting obscene telephone calls," she said.

"I'll be damned!" Munro's swivel chair creaked as he sat

forward in surprise. "And you a cop. Tell us about it."

"There isn't much to tell. Some man calls me about midnight every night and wakes me up and—talks to me. I lie awake a long time afterwards, trying to forget the stuff he shouts at me."

"What kind of stuff?"

"The usual. I don't need to go into detail, do I?"

It was Munro's turn to be embarrassed. He said hastily, "We get all kinds of nuts on this kick, Cora. Some of them haven't got sex on their minds at all. Some are sadists, playing cruel practical jokes, some are religious cranks, confessing their sins to perfect strangers, that kind of thing."

"Oh," said Cora. "Well, my nut has sex on his mind."

Looking at Cora, I could believe it.

"How many times has this creep called you?" Munro asked her.

"Twelve, I think. Once every night for twelve nights."

Sergeant Munro took up a pencil and made a note. "Always about the same time? Midnight, you said?"

"Yes. Give or take fifteen minutes either way."

"Does he know your name?"

"He must. The first two or three times, he asked if I was Mrs. Simmons."

Munro lifted his head. "Mrs?"

"I'm a widow," she said. "My husband died two years ago. That's why I joined the lady cops."

"Sorry," Munro apologized. "I didn't mean to bring up painful..." He cleared his throat. "Then you live alone, I take it?"

She nodded.

"Well," the sergeant suggested, "if he knows your name, maybe you know him. Anything about his voice sound familiar to you? Accent, inflections, anything?"

"I can't tell much from his voice. It's muffled, like he's talking through a cloth or something. You know?"

"Probably is. You're sure it's a man's voice anyway, are you?"

"I'm perfectly sure of that," she said.

"You've been hanging up on him as soon as you recognize his voice, I hope."

She nodded vigorously. "I wouldn't even answer the phone at that time of night, except I'm expecting an important call from my sister. She's pregnant and her baby's already two weeks overdue. She promised to call me long distance the minute—" Cora broke off.

Munro said, "Listen. Cora, you know the telephone com-

pany helps us trace callers like this?"

"Of course."

"Well, it takes a couple of minutes for their tracing gadget, or their traffic monitor, to get a fix on the origin of such a call. So I have to ask you to hang on for a minute or two the next time he calls you. I'm sorry. I know it'll be unpleasant." He smiled at her. "Just try not to listen, okay?"

"All right."

"And stop worrying. We'll have this bird off your back in no-time. Has he ever asked you to meet him anywhere?"

She shook her head. "No, he's never suggested that."

"Too bad. We might set up a little surprise for him. But never mind, we'll get him. One more call should be all we need. Special fast service for lady cops."

"Thanks, Sergeant. I'll certainly appreciate it. He's getting pretty hard to take." She stood up.

"One more thing," Munro said. "What's your telephone number?"

She told him her number and he wrote it down. Then we both watched her walk across the squad room to the door and go out. When she'd gone, the sergeant said, "That's one of our more common complaints, Korelski. Obscene telephone

calls. We've got a routine for handling them."

"You said the telephone company cooperates with us?"

"Yeah. The assistant traffic manager is our man. George O'Hare, a real nice guy." Munro grinned. "George is the earnest type. He gets highly incensed when an instrument as noble as the telephone gets put to base uses like this, so he's as hot to snaffle obscene callers as we are. And that helps."

I nodded. "George O'Hare, assistant traffic manager."

"Right." Munro picked up his phone and asked the switchboard to get him O'Hare. When the telephone man came on, the sergeant said, "George, I've got another obscene caller for you. Pestering a girl—got a pencil?—at this number." He read Cora Simmons' number off his notes. "Got it? Okay. Now this one ought to be easy, George." He paused. "The calls follow a pattern, only one call a night. Always around midnight, within a quarter hour either way."

I could hear O'Hare's voice say tinnily in the receiver, "Too easy to be true. But we'll give it a try. I'll get back to you, sergeant."

"Wait a minute, George," Munro said. "I want to turn the rest of it over to a new detective we're breaking in over

here. He'll be handling some of these cases for us from now on, so we might as well start him off on this one. Yeah. Korelski." He spelled out my name for the telephone man. Then he grinned at me. "No, he's not Irish," he said into the phone. "I don't know what he is with a name like that, but he sure isn't Irish. Yeah. When you get a trace, then, call Korelski on it, okay? And make this one fast, George. It's for a member of the family, you might say."

Sergeant Munro was out on a store robbery investigation when O'Hare called me the next day.

"Korelski?" he said. "That obscene caller Munro reported yesterday—"

"Did you get anything?"

"Damn little." O'Hare sounded disgusted. "If we got the right call—at 11:54 last night on the telephone number Munro gave me—it came from a public telephone booth on Jessop Street. A pay phone."

I said, "That's not much help, is it? Almost anybody could have made the call."

"That's right."

I thought about it. Finally I said, "Mr. O'Hare, will you try again tonight?"

"Sure. Same time limits?"

"Please."

"Okay."

Ten minutes later, I got a

call from Cora Simmons. "They tell me Sergeant Munro is out," she said. "Did you have any luck last night with my—nuisance?"

"No luck." I passed on O'Hare's information. "We need a call from a listed subscriber's own telephone to get a lead on the caller, Cora. But if Sergeant Munro agrees, we'll stake out a man at that pay booth tonight and see if your guy repeats. If so, we'll nab him in the act."

"And if not?" She sounded distressed. "I had a hard time keeping myself from hanging up last night. It was pretty bad."

"Sergeant Munro told you not to listen, Cora."

"I know. But if you can't hang up, it's kind of hard not to listen; did you know that?"

I said, "If he calls again tonight, just leave the telephone off the hook and go away for a couple of minutes, okay? Then come back and hang up quick."

She said in a small voice, "I'll try."

When Munro came into the squadroom an hour later, I told him about the phone booth and he said, "A pay phone, for God's sake! We'll have to put a stakeout on that Jessop Street booth tonight, Korelski, in case he uses it again. Did you ask O'Hare to try again tonight?"

"Yes, I did. And I told Cora Simmons you would probably

put a man on the booth, too."

"Good. Take care of it, will you? One of the patrol car boys in the area ought to be able to cover it for us."

Next morning, O'Hare called me. "Same story, Korelski. Public phone booth again."

"Not the same one," I said, "because we had a man covering it."

"No. This one's on the apron of Gentry's Service Station."

"We'll have it covered tonight, too. Keep trying, will you, Mr. O'Hare?"

O'Hare kept trying. But the obscene caller used a different public phone booth each night to make his call to Cora Simmons. And when, in desperation, I talked her into offering to meet him somewhere in person, he just laughed at her and said he wasn't about to fall for that old gag. By following my advice, Cora managed to avoid hearing most of her caller's conversation, but she was losing a lot of sleep and her nerves were shot. And her sister's baby still didn't arrive.

On the fourth day, when O'Hare called to report another useless trace to another public phone booth and I told Sergeant Munro about it, he said, "We can't assign a man to every public telephone booth in town, damn it! We haven't enough men!"

"What'll we do then?" I asked him.

"Tell Cora Simmons we're licked, I guess. She'll have to stop answering her phone at night, that's all. If she tells the sister who's expecting a kid to send her a telegram when the baby arrives, Cora won't have to answer her phone every night."

I said, "A sex nut like this guy won't stop pestering Cora just because she doesn't answer her phone at night, sergeant. He'll start calling her in the daytime."

"He might, I suppose. But she's out a lot in the daytime, so he might just quit out of frustration." Munro thought for a minute, then said sourly, "I don't know what else we can do. Call her and tell her that."

"Okay," I said, "but I hate to do it, because it means we give up on this guy, and I want him pretty bad by now, sergeant. He's been driving Simmons up the wall."

Munro gave me a look. "You going a little soft on Simmons yourself?"

"She's a nice girl," I said, "and I hate to see her bothered by some jerk we can't locate, that's all."

"So do I," the sergeant said, "it's rotten. But in this business, almost everything is, Korelski."

"Shall I call off George O'Hare then?"

"I guess you'd better. We can't ask the phone company to go on cooperating indefinitely."

He slapped on his hat. "Lieutenant Randall wants me to attend the F.O.P. meeting for him," he said. "I'll see you later. Handle my desk for me." He went out in a temper.

I hated to call Cora Simmons with the bad news, so I called O'Hare first.

"George," I said, "I guess you might as well call off your tracer. The guy's too smart for us. Thanks a million, anyway."

"Forget it, Korelski. Any time, you know that. It's a hell of a way to use a telephone."

"Yeah," I said. While he'd been talking, I'd been thinking. I said, "Wait a minute, George. This creep follows a pretty rigid pattern, doesn't he? He calls every night. He calls at about the same time every night. And he always uses a pay phone to make his call."

"So?"

"So I want to ask you a question, George. I'm new at this, and I may be plain crazy, but—"

"Ask me," O'Hare said.

"Would it be possible to have all the pay phones in town shut down for an hour tonight? So nobody could use any of them to make a call?"

George sucked in his breath. "You're crazy, all right. That would cost us hundreds of dollars in lost revenue, you realize that?"

"But is it possible?"

"Possible?" O'Hare coughed. "Yes, I suppose it is."

"Well, here's what I'm wondering, George. It's almost like this guy has a compulsion to call that number every night without fail. So what if we frustrate his powerful compulsion tonight? He goes into a pay booth at the regular time to make his call. The phone won't work. He tries another pay phone. It won't work, either. He can't find a single booth anywhere with a phone that'll work. So in order to keep to his pattern, he might just possibly be forced to use a private phone to make his call—a private phone you could spot. You see what I'm driving at?"

George was dubious. "I guess so," he said. "I'll have to ask my boss about this one, though, Korelski. I'll call you back."

Fifteen minutes later, he called to say that his boss agreed to the experiment. For one night only. And only one hour. Half past eleven till half past twelve.

"Tonight?" I said.

"Tonight, yes."

"Good." I decided it wouldn't hurt to wait one more night.

before I told Cora Simmons we'd fallen flat on our faces.

"It won't work, Korelski," George said.

"These guys are mostly nuts," I argued. "You never know what they'll do."

"I still say it won't work," George insisted.

But George was wrong.

Early next morning, he was on the telephone to me reporting success, totally unexpected success. He gave me the telephone number from which Cora's obscene call had originated last night, and the name of the listed subscriber to whom that number was assigned. That was more than enough for me to go on.

I wanted to tell Cora Simmons the good news before I told anybody else. And for some reason, I wanted to tell her in person. So I signed out a police car and went over to the Main and White intersection where she was on duty.

She was holding up traffic on Main Street when I got there, trading smiles and "good mornings" with the children she herded across the intersection to the safety of the school grounds. She looked fresh and crisp in her Ladycop uniform. But she had tired lines in her face.

I parked beside a fireplug and waited until she was

temporarily free before I called her over.

When she saw who was driving the police car, she seemed to guess what was coming. Joy came into her face. She leaned down and said through my rolled-down side window, "Korelski! You've caught him!"

I gave her back the smile and said, "Yes, we have, Cora. We've got him. You can get some sleep tonight at last. I'm just sorry it took so long."

"How did you catch him, do I know him?" Cora asked all in one breath.

"Just a guy who must have seen you on this corner sometime and took a fancy to you," I said. "Probably asked one of the kids your name. I'll tell you about it later. Anyway, I just wanted you to know he won't bother you any more."

Cora's blue eyes were warm with thanks. "I don't know what to say. You have absolutely no idea what a wonderful relief this is!"

"Forget it," I advised her.

She began to speak again but a group of children swelled off the sidewalk into the street just then, and she had to run back to her corner.

I called after her, "Hope your sister's kid arrives okay," and put my car into gear and pulled away from the fireplug.

Cora waved at me as I turned into White Street.

It was Sergeant Munro's day off, and Lieutenant Randall, the head of the Detective Bureau, was out on an assault case when I got back to headquarters, so I had to wait till three o'clock that afternoon before I could report to anyone.

I went into Lieutenant Randall's office, stood in front of his desk, waited until he raised his yellow eyes to me, and said, "Excuse me, Lieutenant, have you read my reports on the Cora Simmons obscene caller complaint?"

"Sure," said Randall. "The public phone booth nut?"

"That's the one. I think we've got him."

"Good going, Korelski. Picked him up yet?"

"Not yet. I wanted to do a little checking first. To be sure he's our man."

"Never hurts to be thorough. And is he our man?"

"It looks like it, sir. The telephone booths he's been using to make his calls are all located in the general area between his job and the apartment where he lives. I plotted them on a town map this morning. And he gets off work at eleven-thirty every night, so it seems pretty certain

that what he's been doing is stopping off each night on his way home to make his call to Cora Simmons."

He nodded at me. "That figures." Then his yellow eyes blinked as a thought struck him. "Lucky he finally made a call you could trace. That pay booth dodge was smart."

I said as modestly as I could, "It wasn't exactly lucky, sir. It was a little trick O'Hare and I dreamed up that nailed him." I told the lieutenant about shutting off service on all the pay phones in town for an hour.

Randall grinned. "Good thinking. Have you told Mrs. Simmons yet?"

"This morning, yes sir. She was very relieved and grateful."

"Only natural." Randall dropped his eyes to a file on his desk, a sign that our interview was over. "Go pick him up then, Korelski, and close the file. That's the next step."

I said, "I'd rather you made the arrest, sir."

"Me?" Randall's head jerked up and his face got red. He couldn't believe his ears. "You need help to pick up a lousy telephone pest, Korelski? Who the hell is this obscene caller of yours, anyway? The mayor?"

"No, sir," I said. "It's Sergeant Munro."

She had gone, leaving him nothing but her hatred—and one deadly thing more.

IN THE BAG

by

HERBERT

HARRIS



ONCE AGAIN, as he held the young cabaret dancer in his arms, Denham closed his eyes and pictured the wrecked safari-wagon...the wrecked car and the mangled and blackened remains of the wife he no longer loved.

He was not horrified but only soothed by the prospect of the coming disaster. It would happen soon now—on the rough, straight, lonely road ribboning over the parched desert-and-scrub land between Musaki and Kandula.

The wife of a colonial official would die violently, and she would not be the first in this corner of Africa, torn by tribal hatred and warfare. In

death, he thought, the stately blonde, Elinor, could scarcely be colder than she was in life.

Somewhere outside, beyond the sun-bleached stucco veranda, a car door banged, and he felt Manuela stiffen and become suddenly alert.

"Your wife?" she asked in a husky whisper.

"Blast her," Denham muttered through taut lips. He looked out of the upper window. "She's tinkering with the car, though. She won't be in for a while. You'd better slip down the back stairs and out through the servants' quarters."

He watched Manuela hungrily as she squeezed into the tight black dress, his whole being

thrilling again to the curving perfection of the dancer's body.

"With luck," he said, "Elinor will be going tomorrow."

"So, for a few weeks, we can be together all the time, Paul?"

"Yes." Standing behind her, Denham parted the long black hair and kissed the nape of her neck.

"I'll go now, darling," Manuela said, pulling his head down to kiss his mouth. And in a moment only her strange, haunting perfume remained.

"You're home, Paul?" his wife called.

"Coming!" he yelled back.

He paused, before going downstairs, to lock the door of his den and pocket the key. He had been careful during the past few weeks to keep the door of his private study locked.

Not that Elinor was interested in his hobbies and pastimes. She had always been completely wrapped up in her own activities. It would, nevertheless, have been fatal if she had wandered into his den and stumbled on his special secret.

Elinor was arranging some flowers when he went into the livingroom. He narrowed his eyes anxiously.

"You've not changed your mind about going tomorrow?" he asked.

"No... I shall go as planned," Elinor said. "But I

mustn't leave you with a lot of withered flowers, must I? I shall be accused of neglecting you."

Oh, no, he thought bitterly, it isn't your withered flowers that make me hate you—it's your withered love.

She was quite attractive really. Men took notice of her pretty doll's face and the graceful, slender figure when they appeared at the Europeans' Club. But compared with the warm animal magnetism of Manuela—

"They say the rioting in the frontier region between Musaki and Kandula has died down quite a lot," Denham remarked, surprised by the glibness of his own lying.

"I've really not thought about it," she answered coolly.

No, of course she hadn't. Nothing worried her. She had been reared against a colonial background, had become toughened, steely hard. Like her father, the Consul at Kandula, who had wanted his daughter to marry somebody much more worthy.

Denham smiled to himself as he thought of the letter in his pocket, the one that had come only recently from her father.

Dear Paul, As you doubtless know, Elinor is anxious to visit me here, in view of the troubles taking place in this area. I do wish you would try to dissuade

her. Things are infinitely worse in the border area, and to drive here via Musaki could be extremely dangerous.

He had not attempted to dissuade her, of course. He had done everything to encourage her to do the trip. He had merely scoffed at the silly rumours concerning the ambushes, the rapes, the machete mutilations, the snipings, the home-made bombs and mines.

"I'll leave as early as I can in the morning, so that I can get in as much driving as possible before the sun really gets up," she told him. "So I'll pack everything in the car tonight."

The packing...tonight... There was a sudden turmoil of excitement inside him. But he kept his face mask-like. He must do nothing, say nothing that would give away the small and deadly secret locked away in his private study.

"A good idea," he agreed.

"I suppose you'll be pleased to get rid of me?" she asked tartly.

"It will make a change from the everlasting wrangling," he answered.

Oh, yes...in place of the everlasting wrangling, an everlasting peace. And, of course, all that extra money, which would prove extremely useful.

There was a big life insurance on both of them. It

was part of the 'perks' of the job when you took an official post in this god-forsaken place.

Sometime tomorrow morning, when the disaster occurred—well, at 10 a.m. to be precise—he would be richer by several thousands, and a new, fuller life with Manuela would begin.

Very late that evening he retired to his den. To Elinor there was nothing unusual in his doing so. They lived separate lives these days.

He unlocked the steel cupboard in one corner of the room, and took out the small object, which he had carefully constructed, like a travelling clock.

He realized that he had started to sweat. It was not from fear, though. He had handled enough of these things as a Sapper in other—and worse—trouble spots.

But the exact fixing of the time-fuse, the priming of the delicate detonator, required a close concentration that played merry hell with the nerves—especially when too much whisky had made the hand unsteady.

She was going to leave promptly at daybreak, she had said. Meaning approximately 5 a.m. Okay, then. Driving via Musaki, it would take her almost exactly five hours, at

Elinor's rate of driving, to reach a point somewhere close to the troubled frontier just this side of Kandula.

Ten a.m. He set the time-fuse with meticulous care. That is when the thing would go up. Elinor would never know what had hit her. And nor would anyone else.

Almost anything, they would say, could have blown this white woman's safari-wagon to smithereens. A crudely made grenade tossed at the car by a European-hating fanatic. A mine placed in the road under a hump of dried mud. Anything...

The time-bomb placed in Elinor's luggage would speedily be forgotten as just another tragic incident in this turbulent land.

Her jewel box would be best. She had never been able to operate the combination of their small safe properly, and had always called on him to do it for her. He had always taken her jewles out for her and put them in the box which she always took everywhere.

Yes, she would want to take her jewels to Kandula. Her proud Daddy would want to show her off at one or two receptions. That meant she would want to take practically everything. Well, there was

plenty of room in the safari-wagon.

Everything would fit neatly into the jewel box. He could lock it before he handed it to her, as he always did. She would take the deadly thing with her cold curt, "Thank you, Paul!" and it would go into the big portmanteau with scarcely a glance.

Of course—he told himself with a smile—he would keep the jewels behind. They would raise quite a bit of money.

Denham went to bed quite happy, but not to sleep very well. Twice he awoke sweating from a nightmare. He was relieved when the dawn came.

Elinor was already about and had been up for some time when he appeared in his dressing-gown, yawning.

"I'll pack your things in the car for you," he offered.

"Can't you get a servant to do it?" she said.

"I'd rather do it myself," he told her.

"All right, Paul...Thank you. I'm leaving very soon."

"I'll go back to bed when you've gone," he said. "I've had a lousy night."

He turned away, not wanting to look at her too long. He knew he was looking at her for the last time.

Actually he didn't wait for her to leave. He knew there

would be no good-bye kiss. They had not kissed for a long time, and now the act would be merely a travesty, an embarrassment.

He was in bed and drifting, into a more settled sleep when Elinor drove the car out of the parched white courtyard and on to the road that led to Musaki and Kandula.

It was broad daylight when Denham awoke. The African sun, gathering strength, was already on his face. He turned and looked at the bedside clock and saw that it was ten minutes to ten.

With a tiny feeling of sickness in his stomach, he realised that Elinor was now somewhere near the frontier before Kandula and that she had roughly ten minutes at the most to live.

Feeling hot and dry, he went down to the kitchen. He took the lemon-barley water from the fridge and poured himself a tall glassful.

On his way back to the bedroom, he caught sight of the note propped against the newel-post of the stairs. It was in an envelope addressed "Paul" in Elinor's writing.

He stuffed the note into his dressing-gown pocket and went back to bed. For some minutes he watched the clock hands moving towards 10 o'clock,

sipping the ice-cold lemon-barley water.

Then, remembering the note Elinor had left, he took it out of his pocket and read it.

'Dear Paul: I have left you not for just a few weeks, but for good. John Warby, whom I've loved since my teens and whom Daddy wants me to marry, is waiting for me in Kandula.'

'I realise you spent a lot of money on me one way and another, and John Warby, of course, is a rich man. So, just to prove I'm not greedy and want nothing from you, I am leaving the box of jewels behind—you bought them all anyway—and I slipped them under your bed for safety, not being able to work the safe.'

Denham read the last few lines twice. His eyes grew larger and round with fear.

He turned quickly and stared at the clock. The hand was exactly on 10 o'clock. A chiming clock downstairs started striking ten.

Denham dropped to his knees and groped under the bed.

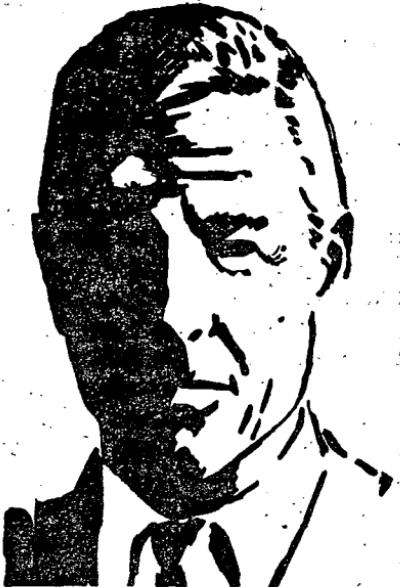
There was a blinding flash.

A native boy in the courtyard stared up, his features contorted with horror, as the upper part of the house disintegrated in a cloud of rubble and dust.

FALL GUY

She was scared and I gave her a hand. Later I found I had given her my money too.

by CHARLES B. VICTOR



I WAS STANDING around in front of the First National Savings Bank watching the departing customers.

It was the first of the month and a lot of the old folks were cashing social security checks or withdrawing dividends, and leaving the bank with a lot of cash in their hands.

I was down to my last twenty bucks.

The idea of making a quick snatch was very tempting. Some of them were still counting the bills as they walked out the door. I was thinking that someone ought to tell them to be more careful with their money.

Stealing money from senior citizens, however, isn't in my line. I was thinking of going in to cash some paper. On a busy day at the bank you could always pick up an easy ten. Even for a check that small they'd generally ask "Do you have an account here?" But if you replied "Of course" confidently enough, they seldom checked. If the teller did reach for the telephone or go to check the files, I'd disappear.

But I was wondering if it was worth the trouble.

As I was thinking it over a little an old lady bumped into me. She was still counting her

money, had it right out in the open.

"I'm sorry," she smiled. "I didn't see you."

I told her it was okay but that she really ought to be more careful with her money. She tucked the bills into her handbag and started up the street.

I was shaking my head, enjoying her simple faith, when I suddenly realized that something was wrong. That innocent-looking, little old lady had lifted my wallet.

I swore.

I started looking around for her, spotted her up the street. She was halfway up the street, holding open the door of her car, waiting for me. I ran up to the car.

"Get in," she told me. The voice was familiar.

"Aunt Mandy," I said, with genuine surprise. I got into the car.

"I thought it was you, Alley. I lifted your wallet to make sure." She handed it back to me and I put it back in my pocket, trying not to look chagrined.

"Is Louie out of the can?" I asked.

Mandy's husband, Louie 'The Artist' Belten, was doing time for counterfeiting. I'd learned a lot from Louie. He'd been teaching me the trade before he got sent up.

"No, he's not," replied

Mandy. She didn't expand on the subject so I let it ride.

We drove to a quiet residential area in midtown and pulled into the driveway alongside a green-and-white bungalow.

We went inside. A tall, smiling man with slick, black hair, mustache and horn-rimmed glasses shook my hand heartily. "Hello, Alley."

I had to study his face for a moment—the long, broad nose, the cleft in the chin, the narrowed eyes—before it came to me.

"Wheels," I said. "I didn't recognize you at first." In the old days Wheels Mahoney had packed about two hundred and fifty pounds on his six-three frame, but he'd shed at least forty of those pounds. Plus the black hair, the mustache, the glasses, and the conservative clothes he wore. He'd always been a flashy dresser.

"What are you people up to anyway?" I asked.

Before my question got answered Mandy left to change while Wheels and I shared a drink.

On her return, Mandy looked as beautiful as I remembered. She had to be about thirty-five now, but she didn't look it. I'd always wondered why we called her Aunt Mandy. I guess because a guy on the lam could always get help from Louie and Mandy.

"What's with the disguises?" I asked.

"We'll get to that," said Mandy. "Let's go downstairs."

In the basement we examined a shiny new offset press and the plates.

"Louie kept a duplicate set," Mandy smiled. "In case he ever got sent up."

The plates were beautiful, the work of a real artist. They were photographic plates, a set of three, from which one could print quite good ten dollar bills. There was one plate for running the back of the bill, using green ink. Another plate to print the green seal on the front of the bill, at which time you slugged in the serial numbers. A third plate for the face of the bill, to run in black. If you knew anything about printing, you could really appreciate the fine quality of the work.

I picked up one of the tens, examined it carefully.

"What's the problem?" I asked. It looked to me like things were going fine. Maybe I could do a more efficient job press-wise, but, it was obvious that Mandy knew the trade.

"Distribution," Mandy told me. "Spreading all this paper around is going to be a big job."

"And that's where I come in?"

"That's right. We'll need some help. And when I ran into you, I

knew that our luck was running good."

Wheels smiled dutifully. I guessed that he was second string in the operation. But it was also pretty obvious that they were living together, a fact Louie might not appreciate. I wondered if Louie was aware of it.

We went upstairs and sat down.

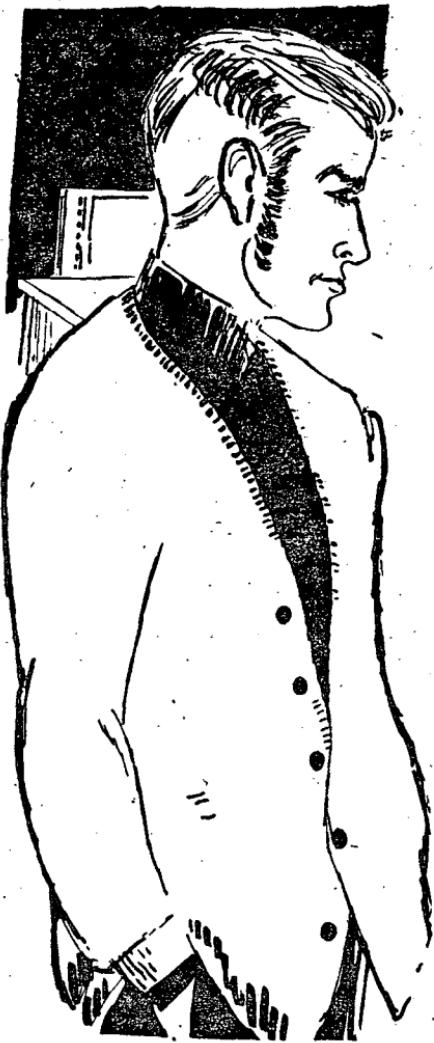
"What's the plan?" I asked Mandy.

The way Mandy explained it, it sounded like a pretty complicated operation. In practice, however, it seemed pretty straightforward.

Mandy, wearing her old lady getup, cased the places, like the big supermarkets and department stores, where they took in a lot of cash. While pretending to be making a complaint to the manager she'd size the guy up, look over the set-up. Mandy can feel out the pigeons fine.

If things looked good, Wheels and I moved in.

Most of the time we posed as treasury agents, sometimes as FBI men. We looked the parts. Since Wheels had dyed his hair, lost some of the weight he looked good. For this job, the mustache and the glasses went. I'm about five-ten, 175, and look like anybody. I have the kind of unremarkable, average face that is not particularly memorable; it was decided that it wouldn't



need a disguise. The ID cards we carried were my handiwork.

We'd call in advance and inform the manager that we were coming to see him, but wouldn't

tell him why. Then we'd show up, introduce ourselves—I was Alvin Green, Wheels was George Thompson—and find the privacy of the manager's office.

Wheels would sit there solemnly with the black attaché case shackled to his wrist. That always caught the manager's attention. I would explain the reason for our call: "We have reason to believe that counterfeit ten dollar bills are being passed in this area." Then I would show the guy the pictures of the suspects—a picture of Louie and a picture of another con doing time. We put on a good show for the guy.

"Some of the bad money might have been passed at your store. We'd like to examine the tens you have on hand," I'd explain.

At this point the man would naturally become a bit uneasy. As a rule, money makes people nervous.

"What we want to do," I'd continue, "is to pick up your tens and run them over to the lab for a check."

Now the guy was really panicky. He's wondering if we're legit, and how many phoney tens he really might have. That's the trick—build up the guy's anxiety, then relieve it.

Wheels began to open the briefcase with the key I handed to him.

"Of course, you'll need cash to operate with." Wheels opened the case. "So while we're running a check on your currency, we'll replace it with good bills."

Now I was bringing the guy down. It didn't look so bad to him. And if, during the course of it all, he stopped to call the number on our cards, he'd get Mandy on the telephone. Then I'd bring the guy down a little further.

"Unlikely," I'd say, "that we'll find more than one or two bad bills in the lot. What we're trying to do is to pinpoint the area these men are in. We think we may be close." I'd sometimes hint at a reward.

Let me tell you, some of them would fall all over themselves in the desire to cooperate. What did they have to lose? And most of them are insured against loss anyway.

The cash would come in, all the tens, generally anywhere from five to seven hundred of them. We'd count theirs. They'd count ours. We insisted on an accurate count. We'd promise to give them a preliminary lab report within a few hours.

We would give them a lab report, too. We would tell them that no counterfeit money was being passed at their store. The bills were clean and they were out nothing. That always made them feel good.

Meanwhile they were spreading the paper for us.

It was a beautiful operation, the work of a real brain man. We picked up the cash, the real tens, dropped off our own product. Things were going great.

But I was starting to get worried.

Wheels and Mandy were staying cool, figuring that we had plenty of time yet in this town. I figured it was time to move on. Some of the bills we were distributing were finding their way back to us. I knew it was only a matter of time before our operation was discovered, and some manager might pick my face out of a mug book. I was waiting for that knock on the door.

The knock on the door came about three weeks after we'd started. I was in my apartment at the Mansfield Arms when two guys, who smelled of fuzz, dropped up to see me.

I closed the peephole, got ready. Then I answered the door, not as thirty-seven-year-old Albert Sousa, but as a decrepit old man with white hair, rimless glasses, and a pocket hearing aid.

"Yes?"

"We're looking for a man named Albert Sousa."

I nodded, pointed above. "I think you have the wrong floor. Mr. Sousa lives in the apartment above this one. One flight up."

"Thank you," he said.

While they went upstairs, I went downstairs.

I'd been waiting for them, ready.

I had, you see, taken the time and trouble to drop in and visit my old friend, Louie Belten, to tell him about Mandy and Wheels. Louie, as it turned out, also had a few things to tell me, too.

Louie knew all about the operation. He had planned the whole thing. I'd been picked to work with Mandy and Wheels. I'd sort of guessed running into Mandy had been no accident.

"You see," Louie told me. "The way I had this thing set up, I figured on you being picked up. When you got picked up, it would blow the whistle on the operation, tell them it was time to move on." He looked at me. "I had you figured as the fall guy, but what you told me

throws a new light on the situation."

I was glad of that.

"I want them caught," said Louie.

"Tell me what to do," I said.

So I got my own disguise, which I wore when I wasn't working. I let them find me. And when they found me I walked away from them.

After I got to the street, into my car, I found a telephone. I called Mandy and told her that I'd like to see both her and Wheels up in my apartment. I had a nice surprise for them.

Let them walk into the trap.

It was time for me to clear out. I thought maybe I'd go up to Canada for awhile. They have some beautiful scenery up there. But, before I left, I stopped off at the green-and-white bungalow and picked up the plates.

They'd make a nice present for Louie when he got out.

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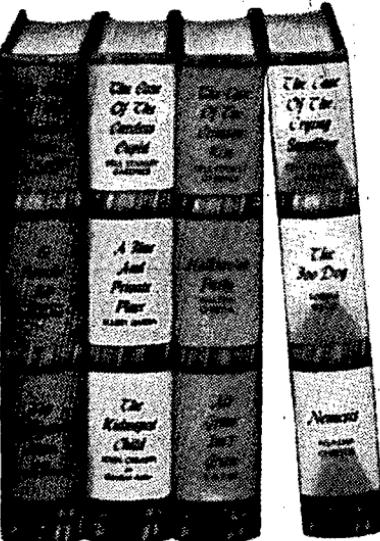
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